

**COLLOQUY AND CONTINUITY: THE INTEGRATED
DIALOGUES OF BLANCHE EDITH BAUGHAN**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts in English
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Emma Katherine Bond

University of Canterbury

1998

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	3
I. THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE	12
1. Critical Fictions	12
2. Cultural Nationalism and the Mid-Century Privileging of the Poetic	16
3. The Effects of the Retrospective Influence of Masculinism	27
II. THE LITERARY DIALOGUE	36
1. Baughan as Vagabond	36
2. Offering Alternatives - Baughan's Prose Representations of Colonial Women	39
3. Baughan's Conversations with Ursula Mary Bethell and Jessie Mackay, and the Creation of a Critical Audience	46

III.	THE VEDANTA DIALOGUE	62
1.	The Poetic Cessation	62
2.	Reading Vedanta	72
3.	Towards <i>Samadhi</i> - the Dissolution of the Ego-Sense	77
IV.	THE PENAL REFORM COLLOQUY.....	88
1.	Beauty from Ashes	88
2.	Creating Controversy - <i>People in Prison</i> and Baughan's Indictment of the Penal System	94
3.	Conclusion: The 'Real' Art of Social Service	112
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	115
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	121

ABSTRACT

Blanche Edith Baughan quickly created a niche for herself on her arrival in New Zealand, firstly with her poetic career, and later in her work as social reformist. While she is remembered for both these endeavours, she remains better known for her poetry. Accordingly, there has been a good deal of supposition as to why she chose to abandon her relatively successful literary vocation. The research for my thesis began by investigating this puzzling moment in her career. It has generally been acknowledged that there was a radical break in Baughan's life, and that, at about the time she ceased her output as writer, her energies were diverted to humanitarian concerns. However, via an investigation of Baughan's archival papers, this thesis proposes a continuity between these ostensibly separate careers, the key to which is colloquy, or a complex network of dialogues.

I have outlined the development of Baughan's colloquy by exploring those conversations central to her life here. The first chapter looks at the cultural nationalist narrative, and the somewhat awkward positioning of Baughan within a framework that emphasises the 'man alone.' It also recognises that there is an alternative way to read her writing, for Baughan refused to acknowledge factors central to masculinism and instead immersed herself in a network of multiple conversations. Both writing and social work were part of this integrated discourse which enabled her to occupy different areas of engagement contemporaneously. After investigating her literary relationships in Chapter Two, I consider the effects of Baughan's mystical experiences and her involvement with Vedanta in Chapter Three. The concluding

chapter concentrates on her interest in creating 'Beauty from Ashes,' with a reading of the numerous dialogues that make up her penal reform work.

INTRODUCTION

As Michele Leggott has recently pointed out, the impact on New Zealand literature of the critical efforts of the *Phoenix* generation, has meant that what has not yet been considered in any depth is the possibility of another scene of dialogue in early writing. In her essay 'Opening the Archive,' Leggott is largely concerned with deciphering the messages she finds encoded in the poetry of Robin Hyde and Eileen Duggan. But in questioning the position of these women in New Zealand literature, she writes also of their predecessors:

Blanche Edith Baughan...and Mary Ursula Bethell...span the generational gap after Mackay and before Duggan and Hyde, and suddenly we are looking at a capacity for shaping New Zealand poetry in the first half of the century as a politically alert, humanitarian enterprise, diverse in its subjects and styles but run on sympathetic and highly reticulated energies that took as their point of departure the socially progressive atmosphere of the late colonial period.¹

It is of note, then, that a separate conversation privileging different priorities seems to have existed among women writers in colonial New Zealand, a conversation that has since been obscured by the mid-century masculinist outlook that later achieved prevalence. What Leggott suggests in her essay is the need to recognise and investigate this alternative story, thus adding to the discourse already in place a new dialogue, one that seems to have been stimulated, rather than restricted, by the situation in which these women found themselves.

¹ Michele Leggott, 'Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the Persistence of Record,' *Opening the Book: New Essays on New Zealand Writing*, pp.267-8.

It seems, initially at least, that Blanche Edith Baughan (1870-1958) has been less severely affected by the dominance of the existing story than some other colonial writers, especially in comparison with the general critical reaction to more determined romanticists such as Jessie Mackay. However, although she remains one of New Zealand's more visible colonial literary women, much of this recognition comes from the cultural nationalist merits attributed to her poem 'A Bush Section.' The large balance of her other writing is still not particularly well-known, made less visible, perhaps rather ironically, by the same lens and perspective that makes history of the above poem. Although the critical reaction to 'A Bush Section' will be considered in more depth in the first chapter, it provides a useful point of entry to the major issues under discussion in this thesis. Among criteria that were successfully instituted by Allen Curnow as the critical and determining factors of 'good verse' are the dominant tropes of isolation and alienation, part of a framework which recognises the difficulties of life in what R.A.K. Mason had described as '...this far-pitched perilous hostile place/ this solitary hard-assaulted spot/ fixed at the friendless outer edge of space.'² These same conditions are to be found in 'A Bush Section,' where the protagonist stands diminutive and remote on his bush-cleared land, and the imagery, too, has a precursory ring: like Mason's, Baughan's is a 'rough and raw prospect,' a 'tumultuous landscape' that is 'Ruin'd, forlorn, and blank,' and 'lonely, bristling with hardship...'³ Yet with regard to the issues that Leggott highlights, and with reference to an alternative sense of discourse, what becomes important here is that in Baughan's poem, the ideas central to the masculinist dialogue always threaten

² R.A.K. Mason, 'Sonnet of Brotherhood,' Bornholdt *et al*, p.464.

³ Baughan, 'A Bush Section,' *Shingle-Short and other Verses*, pp.79-88.

to dominate, yet never actually achieve ascendancy. In Baughan's original version,⁴ Thor Rayden's optimism, and the opportunities presented by a new country, mean that the fascination with the 'man alone' in hostile New Zealand terrain which becomes prominent in later masculinist writing is forestalled. Thus, the poem poses questions which imply positive answers ('What change, O Changer! Wilt thou devise and decree?') rather than continually focusing on the intrinsic negativity that the same circumstances might otherwise suggest. As Baughan demonstrates to the contemporary reader, one truth of early life in the settler colony involved remoteness, adversity, and literary isolation. The many efforts of the *Kowhai Gold* writers to disregard these difficulties resulted in an attitude that Curnow later called 'the curse of all creative efforts,'⁵ while the reaction of his own generation against this 'degraded aestheticism'⁶ was a poetry of explicit alienation. In a sense, then, Baughan's perspective displaces both these reactions: the irony of the recognition that 'A Bush Section' has achieved is not that it acknowledges this cultural and geographical isolation, but that Baughan seems intent on relegating these motifs to a position of less dominance.

Writing when she did, then, how did Baughan manage to achieve this double displacement? In her PhD thesis, Nancy Harris suggests that because of Baughan's status as an adult expatriate Englishwoman, a woman who had chosen to travel and live in New Zealand of her own volition, she was able to discard the rose-tinted spectacles through which many New Zealand-born colonials longed for Britain. This

⁴ Although Curnow re-printed the poem in full for the 1960 Penguin anthology, several reproductions since have been heavily edited. In addition to Curnow's text, the original version of the poem can be found in Baughan's book *Shingle-Short*, and in the 1997 Oxford edition of *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*.

⁵ Curnow, 'A Dialogue with Ngaio Marsh,' *Look Back Harder*, p.79. Hereafter this text is referred to as *LBH*.

immediate knowledge of English reality prevented Baughan from yearning sentimentally and nostalgically for 'Home' in her poetry, in the way that later critics like Curnow would decry. Harris writes of Baughan's experiences: 'Quite simply, she had seen too much of the grim social reality of her homeland to retain a sentimental Old World nostalgia.'⁷ At the same time she proposes that Baughan's foray into New World transcendentalism and its concern with 'oneness' helped her to avoid that sense of literary exile which Harris names as common to other writers like Arnold Wall, R.A.K Mason, Curnow, A.R.D Fairburn and D'Arcy Cresswell: 'This heavy emphasis on loss, loneliness, and truncation from cultural roots is, at least, the received impression. But Baughan seems not to have received it...her transcendentalism appears to have been a significant factor in promoting a different reaction, insulating her from the anguish of isolation allegedly suffered by those who preceded her, her contemporary writers, and many of those to follow.'⁸ Yet arriving alone in her chosen country, Baughan herself notes, 'I knew nobody in New Zealand,'⁹ and it does seem that she held a healthy, if only temporary respect, for the same problems that were to pervade the literature of the generation following her. The focus of some of her prose writing demonstrates that she, as much as anybody, was aware of New Zealand's geographical isolation, of its small population, and its colonial culture, seemingly alienated from both 'here' and 'there.' If it can indeed be assumed that Baughan recognised some of these factors, and was at least moderately affected by a feeling of loneliness, then she also managed to find alternative ways of dealing with it. Despite an awareness of isolation she proved able to cast her situation into perspective,

⁶ Curnow, 'A Dialogue with Ngaio Marsh,' *LBH*, p.79.

⁷ Nancy Harris, *Making It New*, PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1992, p.9.

⁸ Harris, p.82.

⁹ Harris, p.9.

allowing herself (and consequently her protagonist Thor Rayden) to view the colonised land as an occasion of new beginnings, in a way that some other writers could, or would not.

However, in this resolve Baughan was less of an exception amongst her peers than Harris perhaps suggests, and in her determination to establish these beginnings, she becomes, instead, representative of a multi-layered and intricately networked conversation. Identifying ways to read these dialogues, Leggott highlights the factors of humanism, optimism, and most importantly, colloquy:

Hyde, Duggan, Mackay, Baughan and Bethell all conserve and transmit a humanistic warmth...determined by their practical commitments to social justice...It is this blend of the pragmatic and the idealistic that makes them seem curiously engaged (if not at home) here...their optimism and their perseverance comes as a welcome respite from the gloomy young flagellants...

Writing women acknowledged terror [of a land of inaudible stories and unspeakable difference] but did not abandon the possibility of colloquy; and some of them literally walked out into that landscape, talking, reporting on experience.¹⁰

The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definition of colloquy, 'A discourse, a dialogue, (spoken or written); an act of conversing; a conversation,'¹¹ and it is, I will argue, a comprehensive pursuit of discourse, dialogue and conversation which enabled Baughan to embrace her New Zealand lifestyle and locale in a manner foreign to those writers living in the heyday of cultural nationalism. Taking 'Opening the Archive' as a point of departure, and developing this metaphor of multiple conversations, my thesis will examine how the network of dialogues that Baughan was involved in - expressions of the 'socially progressive

¹⁰ Leggott, p.275.

¹¹ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, p.441.

atmosphere' which Leggott identifies - displaced the preoccupation with anxiety and terror, and allowed for a shift of emphasis towards different areas of engagement.

In the search for new ways to read Baughan, the obituary written by her best friend Berta Burns provides a challenging direction: 'If one ignores entirely her literary work...her practical work for others has ensured her a place in New Zealand's history...Her life work will always remain her true memorial, graven in the hearts of those she helped...'¹² For the most part this thesis corroborates Burns' statement, as it concentrates primarily on a study of archival material, and an investigation of Baughan's later, non-literary writing. In one sense, however, Burns' emphasis remains problematic. In making separate reference to Baughan's humanitarianism and writing, Burns' comment highlights what has become the most common and abiding assumption about her friend, the idea that during her life Baughan occupied two very separate existences, firstly as writer, and secondly as humanitarian. But with Baughan, as with Duggan and Hyde, there is a 'persistence of record'¹³ which disputes such a reading. Archival evidence indicates, firstly, that in her career as social reformist Baughan utilised her writing capacity to the full. Documenting, reporting and publishing, she was also involved in a productive exchange of correspondence. Secondly, it is only because of Baughan's continuing engagement as a writer while she was involved in her penal reform efforts that we are able to understand how truly integrated were these two facets of her life. Leaving behind a written record of her work, she enables the memorial 'graven in the hearts of those she helped' to become a text that can be read. The most important consequence of reading Baughan's

¹² Baughan's Obituary Notice, *Akaroa Mail*, 22 September, 1958.

¹³ Leggott, p. 267.

colloquy, then, is that it displaces an apparent division in her life work, and reveals instead an implicit continuity.

Predominantly, this sense of disjunction in Baughan's career has been underwritten by the framework of the cultural nationalists. Parameters which posit remoteness and singularity of focus as the most viable model for New Zealand writing have made it easier to see her engaged in quite distinct occupations at different times. Challenging such an authoritative discourse, it is often difficult to validate new conversations. In recognition of this, the first chapter in this thesis examines the manner in which this dominance was achieved, concentrating on the influence of mid-century masculinism, with its emphasis on isolation, geographical disconnection, and cultural alienation. It also considers the favoured paradigm of the suffering artist, and the ways in which this narrative eventually worked to sideline alternative models. With reference to early colonial writers who fall outside the parameters constructed by the cultural nationalists, the chapter continues with a look at the negative retrospective influences effected by this type of prescription. Most obvious of these is the attitude towards writing women, many of whom suffered allegations of amateurism and sentimentality about their verse; however, it is noted here that Baughan's work is acknowledged for those attributes that can be seen to pertain to the cultural nationalist project. Although such recognition means that she is more visible to the contemporary reader than many other colonial writers, the dominance of the Curnow narrative that endorses her also makes it more difficult to realise Baughan as representative of any different framework.

The second chapter, focusing on her literary dialogue, and identifying the influences of her vagabonding, begins by discussing the way in which Baughan

responds to those issues highlighted in the masculinist agenda. It then introduces the way in which she utilises colloquy in her writing, firstly as the means by which any feelings of isolation are combated. After a consideration of the sense of community present in her prose works *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven* and *Two New Zealand Roses*, the same camaraderie is discussed for the part it plays in Baughan's personal literary life. A reading of conversations with Ursula Bethell and Jessie Mackay (dialogues established during Baughan's period as poet) helps illustrate her practice of partaking in conversations distinguished by multiple layers of interest.

The third chapter begins by addressing the debate surrounding Baughan's lack of poetic output after *Shingle-Short*. However, once the diversity of her other interests is made apparent, the initial problem becomes at the same time easier to understand, and less important. I argue here that information contained in the prolific exchange of letters between Baughan and her spiritual teachers provides perhaps the most vital link in understanding the conundrum about her poetry and her humanitarianism. This material indicates that the search for spiritual peace and salvation played an active part in the discontinuation of Baughan's writing, and that she deliberately turned away from activities requiring an intense focus on the self. I suggest that in response to Baughan's interest in Vedanta, a school of thought that requires the complete submission of the ego, it was her desire to 'educate Beauty from Ashes' which instigated what otherwise appears her rather abrupt transition to prison reform work. The final chapter focuses on this humanitarian effort, looking at the manner in which Baughan's correspondence with prisoners and individuals such as Frederick de la Mare and Lincoln Efford made up a colloquy employing the principles derived from her commitment to Vedanta. Thus, we see in the last three chapters how the literary

and spiritual dialogues culminate in a humanitarian enterprise inspired by Baughan's increasingly focused desire to witness beauty in all things.

In 1964 Winston Rhodes, a lecturer at Canterbury University, wrote to Nettie Palmer:

As for Blanche Baughan...We spent a few hours with her - a strong-minded, gallant and sensitive woman who was seemingly content to live for herself and by herself...her books are nearly forgotten, partly because they were written so long ago...Like a number of the earlier generation she has found no biographer to bring her back to the present generation - a pity...Her few books are of course in the libraries here; but there is nothing in print, though sometimes it is possible to come across "Shingle-Short" in a secondhand bookshop...¹⁴

Although Baughan's texts are still difficult to come across, it is encouraging to think that realising some of the alternative conversations she was involved in may also stimulate new interest in her extraordinary life. However, Baughan, through the compound nature of her colloquy, is always part of a bigger picture. Rather than approaching her literary, spiritual and humanitarian interests as separate occupations, she acknowledges their implicit correlation. Baughan's career, encompassing as it does a sense of community and camaraderie, is embodied in an integrated discourse that incorporates other writers who see their work the same way. Accordingly, the realisation of her involvement in coexistent dialogues re-positions the hegemonic cultural nationalist framework among a range of literary practices. In this way, it contributes to a more comprehensive context within which to read New Zealand writing during the first half of this century.

¹⁴ Letter from H. Winston Rhodes to Nettie Palmer, 1964, MS 888, Alexander Turnbull Library. Hereafter the Turnbull is referred to as Wtu.

CHAPTER I

THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE

1. Critical Fictions

Some time shortly after the turn of the century,¹ the following appeared on a newspaper page rather lengthily entitled ‘Printed World, Books and Recollections, their Builders and Reviews.’

A New Zealand paper recently held a competition to decide ‘the six most popular authors’...

Frank Morton	1
Arthur H. Adams	2
A. Gladys Kernot	3
Will Lawson	4
B. E. Baughan	5
Jessie Mackay	6

...the order of attributed popularity almost exactly inverts the order of poetical merit...Miss Baughan has written vigorously, vividly, beautifully, sympathetically, poetically. Miss Mackay is a poet.

Critical prescriptions have affected, and will continue to affect, the way that much of New Zealand’s colonial literature is perceived. From the time of colonisation through to the arrival of the *Phoenix* generation, the New Zealand literary community generated an abundance of writing, including poetry that was later to be categorised under the negative and regularly quoted maxim, of ‘trivial, fanciful, simply bad

¹ The clipping that this comes from is included with the Mackay papers (See Footnote 56, Chapter Two) but there is no reference as to the newspaper that published it, or the date of publication.

verse.’² Until recently, this opinion remained authoritative, even though in their day many of these writers provided enjoyable reading material for a faithful colonial public. For example, a *mélange* of criticism since her death has seen female poet Jessie Mackay³ often slighted, with her various detractors identifying at times a ‘fearful insensitivity of ear,’⁴ and tagging her writing ‘awful pseudo-Scottish stuff.’⁵ However apt this might now seem, Mackay’s early popularity, apparent in the article above, suggests that this same attitude has not always prevailed. Put simply, the newspaper excerpt shows just how significantly prominent critical reviewing is able to change both the expectations and the convictions of the reader. Taken in consideration with the critical narrative that was to follow through the mid-century, the poll becomes notable in several ways.

Firstly, it is clear that, at least during her own lifetime, Mackay was being read within a very different framework from that in which she has more recently been considered. The style and subject choice that has made her verse lose favour with later critics clearly appealed to the colonial audience she was addressing, a fact which helps demonstrate how definitively parameters have changed. Secondly, it is of some interest to note that, although the competition calls for ‘the six most popular *authors*,’ all those chosen are actually poets, a selection that can be seen to foreshadow mid-century thought concerning the concept of the artist, and that places the colonial audience somewhat uneasily in sympathy ‘with those who believe that the poet’s vision goes deepest...’⁶ This doctrine will be discussed later in the chapter. Thirdly, and bearing in mind how predominant male writing has been in New Zealand, at least

² Allen Curnow, ‘Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*,’ *LBH*, p. 45.

³ Mackay’s friendship with Baughan will be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴ Curnow, ‘Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,’ *LBH*, p.146.

⁵ Patrick Evans, *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, p.46.

between World War I and 1975,⁷ it is notable that three of these six writers are women. Furthermore, one of these three has continued to find conditional critical favour, managing to uphold her colonial reputation in spite of changing poetic agendas. Awarded what has become the conventional accolade of producing ‘the best New Zealand poem before Mason,’⁸ Blanche Baughan is one of the few colonial writers who has been positively represented in New Zealand critical texts. It has already been noted that she migrated to New Zealand from England,⁹ and her third book of poems, *Shingle-Short*, was published here in 1908. It is this collection that includes her poem ‘A Bush Section,’ and Allen Curnow’s introduction that later applauds it in the 1960 Penguin anthology has effectively ensured Baughan a place in the New Zealand poetry anthologies of the future.

Despite any such recognition, logic dictates that as time progresses it will become more difficult to read writers from previous generations. From a contemporary perspective that has to contend with historical and theoretical fluctuations, the reader’s task is to jump the diachronic divide, and to try and interpret old words without bias. The challenge, then, is not simply to try to re-locate historically individual perceptions, but also to avoid becoming entrenched in any singular critical perspective that may colour the way one reads. Sue Carter writes of this same problem, as it is recognised in New Zealand criticism: ‘The values of the canonical hierarchy are embodied too firmly in our own flesh to shed, and these values are not always

⁶ Monte Holcroft, *The Deepening Stream*, p.84.

⁷ For a more detailed look at the ratio of male to female publication numbers, see Kai Jensen’s book *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature* which records approximations in graph format. pp. 100-101.

⁸ Curnow, ‘Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,’ *LBH*, pp.151-152.

⁹ The best biographical study of Baughan is to be found in Nancy Harris’ thesis.

benign.’¹⁰ In New Zealand literature it is the mid-century narrative that exerts the dominant influence on modern views, still resolutely representing the weight of major critical opinion. From the pages of a historical summary that remains largely grounded in this tradition, Elizabeth Caffin notes somewhat ironically that ‘...description appear[s] to slip too easily into prescription.’¹¹ The purpose of this chapter, then, is to detail the impact of mid-century cultural nationalism on more recent and contemporary readings of the New Zealand colonial poets, and in particular on the work of Blanche Edith Baughan.

Rather than immediately considering those things which enable ‘A Bush Section’ to appear distinct from, and, thus, better than, other colonial poetry, it is first necessary to reflect upon the criteria on which this critical project was based. What is perhaps even more important, at least in the context of exploring new conversations, is to understand how this framework managed to become so firmly entrenched as the authoritative opinion, in such a way that it can still influence how women like Baughan are perceived today. In examining the major critical texts published since the mid-century it is quickly apparent that the nationalist focus still dominates, while the result of repeating the same account again and again is that the one confining and parochial school of thought often appears to be the only narrative. Early in his *Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, Patrick Evans states that ‘There are times when one has to tell the old old story, because that is the only story there is to tell,’¹² and perhaps the real legacy of such a dominant and powerful narrative is that even when trying to tell a new story, one still feels obliged to start with the old.

¹⁰ Sue Carter, *She’ll Be Right: Feminine Perspective in New Zealand Literature*, M.A Thesis, University of Auckland, 1994, p. 1.

¹¹ Elizabeth Caffin, ‘Poetry: 1945-1990,’ *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, p. 386.

2. Cultural Nationalism and the Mid-Century Privileging of the Poetic

There is, as will be obvious to any reader of New Zealand literature, no shortage of opinion and critical information available about the mid-century writers, and the framework that they developed to form the nucleus of our 'national literature': one reason for this is simply that the people involved themselves wrote and printed a large proportion of that information. Yet the previous newspaper excerpt shows to what extent early public feeling was enamoured of the colonial poets, and it is sometimes difficult to see how the later paradigm, based on very different principles, worked its way forward to become the defining influence in New Zealand's historical narrative. What should be considered first, perhaps, is that up to this point, and despite the fact that literary output was prolific throughout the colonial period, no one group was deemed to have concentrated either the time or the resources towards implementing a plan specifically designed to bring about the development of the 'missing' national literature. This opinion has since been used as the foundation for a prominent myth: that pre-*Phoenix* there was no cognizance of this seemingly elusive phenomenon. Yet as Nancy Harris notes in her thesis, the burgeoning friendship between Baughan and Jessie Mackay 'was formative in promoting the *idea* of a national literature.'¹³ The desire for a New Zealand literature was not in fact new, for attempts had already been made to bring about some sense of a cohesive tradition: 'The nationalist if not the nativist impulse...is evident in the first really substantially locally produced

¹² Evans, p.10.

magazine, the *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, which was founded in 1890 specifically to bring about a New Zealand literature.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it was problematic. In 1940, Monte Holcroft's essay 'The Deepening Stream' suggested that the basic elements for such a literature were still absent: '...there can be no vital criticism in New Zealand until there is a genuine literature upon which it can feed...naivete of outlook will be progressively emphasised until a thinker, or group of thinkers, of more than usual capacity provides a focal point for the essential attitudes of the contemporary mind in New Zealand.'¹⁵ The literary scene was primed for the arrival of the well-organised cultural nationalists, and, among other things, the emergence of this generation initiated a conscious change in the concept of art, and the artist, in New Zealand writing.

The most discernible difference between this later group and their predecessors, is that the new writers were able to implement very different, yet definitive critical guidelines, through well-placed and strategic writing that posited a particular recipe as the archetype of New Zealand literature. The most well-known of these interventions are Allen Curnow's two introductions, from *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45* (1945) and *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1960). These writings concretised the mid-century tenets mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, and revolved around a specific set of terms which hung together confidently enough to create a language entirely their own. This discourse became the basis of a new agenda, and the ready availability of high quality printing¹⁶ quickly activated the beginnings of a New Zealand canon that was to become somewhat occlusive. With

¹³ Harris, p.37.

¹⁴ Evans, p.28.

¹⁵ Holcroft, *The Deepening Stream*, pp 63, 77.

the assistance of these two central pieces of criticism and the support of his writing colleagues, Curnow managed both to gain direction of the path of future writing, and to suggest the way that poetry from the past was to be read.

What, then, was behind these new criteria for verse, creating parameters that were able to brand the majority of colonial writing 'sentimental whimsy,' the same verse that had previously been publicly acclaimed by its reading audience? In 1943, Curnow highlighted the following concern - 'Now growing aware that we are alone on islands, we search our history and our earth more humbly than the early versifiers...' ¹⁷ - and in doing so, consciously echoed Holcroft: 'We are still strangers in the land.' ¹⁸ This attitude may be recognised for its pervasiveness, the language now ubiquitous in many New Zealand literary histories. Consequently, when discussing R.A.K Mason's 'Sonnet of Brotherhood,' a high-profile account published as late as 1991 notes that the poem 'is *typical of its period* in drawing on feelings of isolation that affected many New Zealand poets in the 1920s and 1930s, when the country itself still seemed remote and solitary from the European centres of civilisation.' ¹⁹ The concepts of solitude and isolation, paramount in the language of cultural nationalism, have become so entrenched that they persist as representations of a singular 'true' colonial experience even in recent accounts: thus, when MacDonald Jackson suggests that Mason's poem is 'typical of its period,' he also implies, through the word 'still,' that remoteness and solitude have always been the primary New Zealand theme. He further endorses the Curnow tradition by using Mason's poem to

¹⁶ Bob Lowry printed the four issues of the *Phoenix* magazine in Auckland, and after learning the skill from him, Denis Glover proceeded to set up the Caxton Press in Christchurch, in the early thirties.

¹⁷ Curnow, 'Aspects of New Zealand Poetry,' *LBH*, p.39.

¹⁸ Holcroft, p.24.

¹⁹ MacDonald Jackson, 'Poetry,' *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, p.336 (my emphasis).

open the poetry section of the Oxford anthology. The colonial writers emerge eight pages in, with a less than favourable prelude: 'Most nineteenth century New Zealand poets had not only bought with them moribund Victorian poetic modes and disabling conceptions of the poet's role as comforter, moralist, or dreamer, but also lacked talent...' ²⁰ The singular perspective of the nationalists is still heard in this criticism of the 1990s, outweighing alternative conversations, and thus limiting the scope of contemporary readings.

Jackson's reference to 'European centres of civilisation' introduces another dimension to this issue. In recognising the isolated nature of the colonial country, Curnow and his contemporaries were further concerned by what they perceived to be its lack of audience. ²¹ New Zealand's geographical remoteness emphasised a more difficult obstacle, a disabling sense of alienation from western civilisation, and the cultural inferiority that this distance then suggested: 'Poet, novelist or dramatist, conscious of the god within his breast, may feel it intolerable that his art, in any main respect of matter or form, should be limited within a narrow island frontier.' ²² Once again, Curnow is in support of Holcroft: 'Added to this...is the intellectual solitude of those who do their work twelve thousand miles from the central scene of literary activity in the British Commonwealth...It is not so easy to think boldly when ideas are not the common interest of friends...' ²³ Isolation and alienation had become the new catch-phrases, part of a discourse that clearly expressed the disillusionment of the

²⁰ Jackson, p.343.

²¹ This issue is discussed more fully in the following chapter.

²² Curnow, 'New Zealand Literature: The Case for a Working Definition,' *LBH*, p.193.

²³ Holcroft, p.57.

second and third generation 'exiled spirit,'²⁴ and served as a prop to support the new direction in verse.

Considering how strongly these later writers felt their separation from Britain and its firmly established culture, it is ironic that their own replacement agenda now amounts to an equally strong reaction against the colonial interest in romanticism. In contrast to a verse tradition imported from Europe that accentuated 'paradisean vision' and 'rosy pictures,'²⁵ the New Zealand nationalist project involved a shift towards reality and experience, terms which were to become the crucial axiom of the Curnow narrative. Holcroft described the ensuing transition: 'Our recent poets are inclined to be diffident in drawing attention to the hills and the bush, perhaps because earlier writers of verse, in the grip of an imported tradition, composed too many lyrics in an artificial and vicarious manner...I believe that the few genuine poets are now beginning to discover an essential relation between the anatomy of the land and the values of human experience.'²⁶ With the introduction of poetry that centred on '*here* rather than *there*,' and writing that required the reality of hard-graft experience to sustain it, and to make it 'good verse,' the romantic aesthetic seemed out of place. And not only was experience imperative for literary success, it was also a particular type of experience. Intentionally or not, this prescriptivism helped establish the prevalence of the cultural nationalists in two ways. The first, and perhaps the most effective of these, was by the exclusion of female writers in New Zealand.

The change in attitude dictated that 'fanciful aimlessness' be given up, and that it be replaced with a close-up look at what was seen as the intrinsically inimical landscape of New Zealand. Gloom, doom and the awful reality of day-to-day life at

²⁴ Curnow, 'Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*,' *LBH*, p.47.

the bottom of the world succeeded imaginative representations of the colonial country: 'The distinguishing character of the poetry of the 1930s was its responsiveness to the real world in which it was written. For Curnow this meant the physical, social, and historical realities of contemporary New Zealand...By defining reality thus, Curnow was understood to be saying that good poetry had to be attentive to national preoccupations...'²⁷ He was also dictating what these national preoccupations could, and should, encompass, but any representation of mid-century female life and/or experience is notably absent. With specific reference to the cultural nationalist writers, Kai Jensen recently proposed the alternative term 'masculinist',²⁸ indicating how effectively these concepts had excluded the feminine gender. In the *Penguin History*, Patrick Evans also considers this issue:

...the problem for women...was not that their youthful work was worse than men's but that the model being offered as an alternative - the Curnow-Holcroft myth, in effect - was essentially inadequate to them at the time...its realist assumptions and the geographical colouring of its ideology implied a poetry of the outdoors, a life of activity and movement which was simply not necessarily true to the lives of the majority of women at that time.²⁹

Definitive gender differences during the 1930s and 40s, meant that most women were unable to write about this particularly masculine realm of experience. In addition, the principles delineating this experience were so specific, that they precluded women from exploring alternative avenues of reality openly in their verse. As such, the new

²⁵ Evans, p.21.

²⁶ Holcroft, p.23.

²⁷ Caffin, pp.385-6.

²⁸ Jensen introduces this term in his text *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature*.

²⁹ Evans, p.113.

requirements of 'good verse,' along with the presses that endorsed them, eventually acted either to silence women, or to encourage what has since been identified as a process of encoding.³⁰

Within a discourse that explores the concept of multiple conversations, then, it is important to consider how this less than subtle form of censorship worked retrospectively, and whether it also affected the way that the colonial women writers were later perceived. As has been noted, and as Leggott's concept of matrix suggests, there were no shortage of writing women in print over the turn of the century,³¹ partly a testament to the ease with which much verse could then be published. However, *Kowhai Gold*, a large anthology published in 1930, and containing work by many of the colonial poets, has received largely negative recognition, with the primary criticisms involving the lack of 'poetic' criteria displayed by those included: '...*Kowhai Gold* should stand as a warning to the journalistically minded who mistake magazine verse for a nation's poetry. There is nothing in the derivation of "anthology" to justify such diligent scrapings of a small pot's bottom.'³² With this statement in mind, it is obviously significant that this book was the final anthology to be released before the nationalist agenda gained precedence. In comments from as late as 1991, the women in this volume are still being singled out: 'The women poets in *Kowhai Gold* have...decorous thoughts about the beauty - or rather prettiness - of nature, are sentimental about children, mothers, and old folk, let their fancies play around pixies, elves, and sprites, and utter

³⁰ Leggott recognises this process in her essay, with specific reference to Robin Hyde's poetry: 'Folded into it, by enigma and double-coding, are the narratives of emergent female sexuality, something coming the other way, determining contemporary possibility against a dream of history.' p. 270.

³¹ As noted earlier, Jensen's book considers the comparative figures of male and female publications, and finds a distinctly higher proportion of women publishing in New Zealand during the first two decades of this century.

pathetically inadequate pieties when confronted with death.’³³ Here the fault is found, not with the style, form or even language of this poetry, but with the subject matter, which differs so much from the later masculinist writing. The arrival of the cultural nationalist doctrines effected a substantial retrospective revaluation, suppressing the efforts not only of the females of the mid-century generation, but also of many preceding women writers.

Subsequently, much criticism of colonial poets became actively dismissive. Yet this same negativity also applied outside the poetic genre, in other areas of literature. Heather Roberts comments on how these same issues have arisen in New Zealand fiction, where many critics are derisive about work written prior to 1920: ‘J.C Reid stated in 1968 that “no novel of the nineteenth century has any claim to literary worth.”’³⁴ Roberts also notes that ‘Right from the beginning...it was recognised that readers would be presented with an unbalanced picture in favour of a masculine viewpoint,’ but continues: ‘The fact is that there was a large amount of fiction written in New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to ignore it is to ignore a large part of this country’s history.’³⁵ Roberts’ book calls to attention the historical magnitude of this early writing, yet the review she cites demonstrates the power of critical judgement, in any genre, to modify and dictate the way that literature has, and will be read.

The masculinist writers continued to exclude women from the new poetic, making it even more difficult for them to embrace the different parameters by establishing another change which helped to cement their dominance. This involved a

³² Curnow, ‘Aspects of New Zealand Poetry,’ *LBH*, p.34.

³³ Jackson, p.373.

³⁴ Heather Roberts, *Where Did She Come From?* p.10.

³⁵ Roberts, pp.9-10.

shift of emphasis in the portrayal of the poet: ‘...a separating of male and female literature...clearly involves the arrival of a new masculinism with an aggressive possessiveness towards the business of writing.’³⁶ Parallel with the myth that colonial life allowed for no idea of a national literature, is the same story regarding the concept of the artist. Throughout the colonial period, the hard work of settlement and the pioneering lifestyle were considered to have deflected attention and energy away from efforts to write. This attitude, then, suggested that for the colonist the individual career of the writer/poet was secondary, forfeited in favour of the more pressing requirements involved in making a living.

This observation was introduced by Curnow in an overview which suggested that the representations of colonial life to be found in colonial writing were the primary reason such verse continued to be published. In a rather ambiguous look at Alfred Domett and his contemporaries, he dismisses the idea of actual poetic ability: ‘We are to see them, not as gifted poets frustrated by the exigencies of colonial life, but as ambitious men of action on a diminutive stage, who but for those exigencies might have written nothing anyone would wish to preserve.’³⁷ The mention of such ‘exigencies’ initially appears to uphold Roberts’ arguments on the ‘historical magnitude’ of early writing. However, in making a full-time commitment to poetry the main evaluative criterion, the importance of these historical accounts (in verse that was only secondary to public careers) is diminished.

In arguing the way that the colonial poets were to be read, Curnow also ratified a privileged and elite depiction of the modernist nationalist artist dedicated only to his art. This second measure of the ‘successful poet’ involved the idea that the poet

³⁶ Evans, p.81.

should suffer for and through their art, and epitomised the alienated and isolationist vision of the masculinists. In the Curnow introductions, 'the suffering a poem must entail' becomes a marker of poetic validity: 'our true poet is the suffering and demanding spirit of us all.'³⁸ The general acceptance of these parameters as the yardstick of poetic authenticity worked against other writing, firstly by enhancing the backlash against feminine romanticism. Secondly, it encouraged further gender division, because suffering was segregated into a masculine context. As already noted, 'the [poetic] model being offered...was essentially inadequate to [women] at the time...'³⁹ - women, unable or unwilling to embrace the masculinist framework of the 'gloomy young flagellants'⁴⁰ were consequently unable or unwilling to suffer with them. Comparing Mason with Ursula Bethell, Curnow stated that 'even if he were not the finest architect of language New Zealand has produced, [he] would still stand on a plane above [her]; though he has seen and recorded far less of visible New Zealand, he has suffered more as a New Zealander.'⁴¹ Fifty years later, in her discussion of female writers marginalised by this tradition, Leggott notes that Robin Hyde 'stands apart from the flagellation of self and others developed by her male contemporaries as authoritative poetic expression.'⁴²

It was, in fact, in Mason's writing that Curnow first pointed out these specific changes in attitude. Discussing the work of Mason and D'Arcy Cresswell, Curnow indicated that they had both 'discovered in verse an object worthy of life's devotion. That might not have been so remarkable in this country, if they had not insisted that,

³⁷ Curnow, 'Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,' *LBH*, p.146.

³⁸ Curnow, 'Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*,' *LBH*, p.55.

³⁹ Evans, p.113.

⁴⁰ Leggott, p. 275.

⁴¹ Curnow, 'Aspects of New Zealand Poetry,' *LBH*, p.35.

⁴² Leggott, p.272.

as poets and *because* they were poets, they remained responsible adult New Zealanders...That was new; it was “taking poetry seriously,” and it marked the end of the undisputed reign of whimsy in New Zealand verse.⁴³ Supporting Mason and Cresswell, and using terms like ‘discover’ and ‘new,’ Curnow discredited the earlier endeavours that had been made to treat literature as a professional vocation. The problem was not simply that he deemed these attempts to have been unsuccessful. Once again, and as with the early aspirations towards a national literature, the efforts of the colonials were not so much invalidated as totally ignored.

A similar viewpoint recurs in the 1991 Oxford history, which repeats and consolidates the nationalist perspective: ‘The image that Mason projected of the poet as suffering consciousness and conscience of the race helped bring professionalism and a sense of mission to a verse tradition that had been dominated by earnest dilettantism...for Mason to be a poet is not to indulge some harmless hobby but to join the troops for honourable battle.’⁴⁴ Then, in a later comment about Cresswell, Jackson writes: ‘[He] impressed many intelligent New Zealanders by the single-mindedness of his dedication to playing the role of poet...’⁴⁵

Recent investigative writing means that the manner in which the masculinists sidelined the writing of their peers is becoming gradually clearer. Since the 1970s particularly, the negative impact of colonisation on indigenous literature in New Zealand has been recognised: so too, has the cultural nationalist influence on women’s writing. Yet the very existence of a such a dominant story means that attempts to see a different picture encounter intrinsic difficulties. In ‘Opening the Archive,’ Leggott is categorical about the problems faced trying to explore new ways of reading those

⁴³ Curnow, ‘Introduction to *The New Zealand Book of Verse 1923-45*,’ *LBH*, p.51.

women caught up in the 30s and 40s masculinist stronghold: 'I am working in the dark, trying to bridge the distance between their tradition and my standpoint...moving by a kind of textual infra-red, looking for places that make light of historical distance or heat up connections to the present.'⁴⁶ The additional negative effects on colonial women's writing are noted, while an emphasis on chronological distance and the prescriptive nature of the mid-century agenda acknowledges the fact that poems by these women have been occluded. Reading this essay concurrently with Curnow's critical fiction, then, it becomes obvious that the nationalist dialogue reduces the significance of early female writers, because their work is perceived through a framework of male reality and experience. Read within parameters like these, colonial verse cannot help but fall short. This explains at least some of the negative reaction that writers like Mackay have received, and elucidates somewhat the accusations of whimsy and sentimentalism. However, the conundrum that this also accentuates is exactly how, and why, Blanche Baughan manages to avoid the same criticisms being levelled at her own writing.

3. The Effects of the Retrospective Influence of Masculinism

A closer look at Baughan reveals that she is a far more prolific writer than her anthology profile might suggest. As already noted, her most constantly reprinted work is 'A Bush Section,' yet this single poem does not give an adequate representation of a very mixed assortment of writing. During her lifetime, and in

⁴⁴ Jackson, pp.366-7.

addition to her poetry, Baughan also wrote the collection of short stories *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven*, nature prose that was published as something approaching contemporary tourist propaganda, and a small book called *People in Prison* that was designed to further her humanitarian penal reform work. There is also a novel that remains unpublished, entitled *Two New Zealand Roses*, which she wrote in later life, and which is held in manuscript form at the Alexander Turnbull Library. Baughan was by all accounts, too, a spectacularly reliable correspondent, sending regular letters not only to her personal friends, but also to families of incarcerated prisoners, to any person she felt to be in need of encouragement, and to the newspapers. As well as *Shingle Short*, and the two books of poetry *Verses* and *Reuben* that she wrote in England, Baughan wrote a further small selection of poetry, *Poems from the Port Hills*, which was published in 1923. However, many of her poems are now unrecognised by the contemporary reader, and only one or two are generally included in anthologies. Not surprisingly, the poems that do get anthologised are those that initially appear to adhere most strictly to the criteria established by the cultural nationalists.

From the fairly glowing praise he imparts - ‘...nothing about this time compares with Blanche Baughan’s “A Bush Section,” written within a few years of her arrival in 1900’⁴⁷ - it is obvious that specific features of Baughan’s poem appealed to Curnow, and strongly enough for him to single it out from the majority of other verse that was written during the colonial period. Opinion since has generally tended to support his 1960 viewpoint: ‘No earlier New Zealand poem exhibits such unabashed truth to its subject. The vivid density of her language, the rapidity of her exposition,

⁴⁵ Jackson, p.380.

the dramatic shifts of scene and standpoint which are parts of the success of this poem have been strangely overlooked in New Zealand hitherto.⁴⁶ Here the masculinist discourse was in full force, with Curnow singling out those elements of the poem that successfully vindicated the tradition he was trying to establish. The fact that the poem had been 'overlooked' appears less 'strange' when one remembers the negative attitude that this generation had expressed towards colonial poetry. In an article in *Landfall*, Anne Else states: '...it is not in the least strange that Blanche Baughan had been overlooked. The repeated consensus of authoritative opinion, including that of Curnow himself, had been that virtually no poetry worth bothering about had been written before 1920; and those who went looking for some had been chastised for their folly.'⁴⁷

Probably the most valuable result of Curnow's recommendation is that 'A Bush Section' is still regarded with some respect today, rather than being discarded with those other works identified with that 'facile optimism.' Declared the colonial forerunner of the dominant narrative, it is this poem that validates Baughan in the contemporary literary world, and gives her a position of critical ascendancy over her often disparaged peers. Yet at the same time, this recognition has introduced additional problems. Quickly absorbed as a popular appraisal, Curnow's assessment has affected the way the poem has since been both perceived and published. *An Anthology of Twentieth Century New Zealand Poetry*, edited by Vincent O'Sullivan in three different editions from 1970 to 1987, illustrates this point. The first mention of Baughan in his introduction, although somewhat cursory, has a familiar ring:

⁴⁶ Leggott, p.269.

⁴⁷ Curnow, 'Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,' *LBH*, p.151.

⁴⁸ Curnow, p.151.

‘With the exception of Blanche Baughan, no poet before the First World War looked squarely at what was done, thought, and felt...’⁵⁰ A somewhat lengthy poem, ‘A Bush Section’ is trimmed down to a more manageable size. Not in itself that unusual, the nature of the cuts indicate at the very least, a willingness to endorse the Curnow reading of the poem. The edited version has marked similarities with Baughan’s other inclusion, ‘The Old Place,’⁵¹ and O’Sullivan’s introductory claim of fair representation (‘I have tried to represent each poet by a selection large enough to suggest his range in theme, and the variety of his form’⁵²) begins to look rather thin and placatory. In keeping with a nationalist focus, all references to Thor Rayden are removed, and instead of concentrating on the plight of the character who may eventually provide ‘Bright Promise on Poverty’s threshold,’ the landscape remains unpopulated throughout. Thus, the poem comes to represent the fundamental premise of the cultural nationalist discourse: undiminished and conclusive alienation. In *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985) editors Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen largely adhere to O’Sullivan’s cuts, although Thor Rayden does return to the poem. This text also includes ‘Maui’s Fish.’ The more recent Oxford publication *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English* (1997) presents ‘A Bush Section’ in its entirety, but contains just the single Baughan poem.

This is not to suggest, necessarily, that Baughan has been ungenerously represented in the New Zealand anthologies, but more to consider the ramifications of

⁴⁹ Anne Else, ‘Not More Than Man Nor Less: The Treatment of Woman Poets in *Landfall*, 1947-1961,’ *Landfall* 156, p.435.

⁵⁰ Vincent O’Sullivan, ‘Introduction,’ *An Anthology of Twentieth Century Poetry*, p.xxii.

⁵¹ Baughan’s poem ‘The Old Place’ from *Reuben and Other Poems* has some similarities in subject and structure to ‘A Bush Section.’ The first two stanzas consider the isolation and difficulties encountered in New Zealand (‘God! It’s a brute of a place... Where the Missus was always homesick and where she took fever, and died...’) while the second two introduce the positive aspects of life here: ‘This air, all healthy with sun an’ salt, an’ bright with purity:/ An’ the glossy *Karakas* there, twinkling to the big blue twinkling sea...’

such specific selection. In her book *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, Joanna Russ explains how anthologised prescription on the part of the literary establishment may affect the general public perception of an individual writer:

When a work or an author (of the “wrong” sort) does make it into the literary canon of the Great, the Permanent, or (at least) the Serious, there remain two ways of distorting the author’s achievement. By careful selection it is possible to create what I would like to call *the myth of the isolated achievement*, that is, the impression that although X appears in this history of literature or that curriculum or that anthology, it is only because of one book or a handful of (usually the same) poems, and therefore X’s other work is taken to be non-existent or inferior.⁵³

Russ’ point is confirmed, with reference to Baughan’s poem ‘A Bush Section,’ when one considers the comparative obscurity of much of Baughan’s other writing. In trying to realise readings of Baughan outside the dominant cultural nationalist discourse, it is clear that, as yet, she has required the positive affirmation of this tradition to remain visible.

History has demonstrated that without suitable and conclusive endorsement from a dominant discourse, access to marginalised writing may become extremely difficult. The struggle to establish indigenous writings is recognised as a collective problem in colonised countries, as is the effort needed to implement and validate women’s writing in the face of a predominantly patriarchal tradition. When a text from outside that tradition is brought forward, it is apt to appear as if from nowhere, with no narrative to support it. The challenge, then, is that of exploring alternative dialogues, allowing new and different voices to become enabled through the strength of their own different

⁵² O’Sullivan, p.xx.

⁵³ Russ, p.62.

conversations. Discussing the continued emergence of women's writing, feminist Adrienne Rich writes: 'Women's culture...is active: women have been the truly active people in all cultures...Today women are talking to each other, recovering an oral culture, telling our life-stories...analyzing the language that has lied about us...' ⁵⁴

Reading New Zealand colonial women's writing through the masculinist discourse that follows it, any active female reality is conspicuously absent: it is, therefore, necessary to investigate different perspectives on writers like Baughan, and to recognise that these women, too, were involved in the process of 'talking to each other.'

If Baughan is not to continue being represented solely through the cultural nationalist story, then, what is required is a faculty analogous to Leggott's textual 'infra-red,' and the initiation of research into the different conversations and contexts that make up her life and writing. Beginning this work, Nancy Harris completed a PhD thesis on Baughan in 1992. To date there is no biography available, but the opening chapter of Harris' work contains a very useful and detailed account of Baughan's somewhat extraordinary life, extracted from a variety of sources, including archive material, personal interviews and a reading of the strongly autobiographical manuscript of *Two New Zealand Roses*. The thesis is divided into two halves, with the second involving: '...an exploratory study of her major poetic texts, the five very long works I have termed "colonial allegories": "Shingle-Short," "A Bush Section," "Maui's Fish," "Burnt Bush" and "The Paddock"'. ⁵⁵ Obviously, with a view to the exploration of new dialogues, the attention given to a poem like 'The Paddock' is beneficial in bringing Baughan's lesser-known work back from the wilderness, and re-

⁵⁴ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, p.13.

⁵⁵ Nancy Harris, p.vi.

establishing it in critical circulation. However, in reading her solely as ‘poet,’ the masculine framework that privileges such interpretation is continually reaffirmed.

What the first half of Harris’ thesis proposes is that Baughan should be read as a nascent ‘modernist,’ and that ‘she had in fact, by 1908, introduced many of the changes currently credited to New Zealand poets of the succeeding generation.’⁵⁶ Harris supports these claims with reference to Baughan’s mysticism and ‘New World’ transcendentalism, her readings of Carlyle, Emerson and Whitman, suggesting that her ‘refusal, in the allegories, to be held to conventions of scansion and “poetic” language are manifestations of a move *en route* - not to Modernism, but to a relative “modernism”.’⁵⁷ Yet by always positioning Baughan with reference to the *Phoenix* generation (and despite the fact that the autobiographical information she makes available points to a very different career than that of the ‘suffering poet’) Harris is still reading Baughan within the boundaries of the nationalist/masculinist paradigm, and inside a discourse that continues to privilege the poetic. Rather than investigating the possibility of any new and alternative conversations, Harris presents Baughan as the ‘forerunner’ of the masculinists, still grounded by a historical bias that continues to magnify the ‘old, old story.’

Harris also upholds the masculinist concept of the ‘professional artist,’ and endorses the mid-century ideal of the poet. In 1902, Baughan moved from Ormandville in Hawke’s Bay to Chorlton on Banks Peninsula, and while living there wrote both *Shingle-Short* and *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven*. Harris states clearly that Baughan was fully committed to her writing during her time at Long Look-Out: ‘Baughan did not make of herself a public work of art as did Cresswell and de

⁵⁶ Harris, p.v.

Montalk, but like them she had a sense of poetry as a vocation...she lived and wrote in a single room in a simple Chorlton farmhouse, and had no other occupation. In this she was virtually unique among her contemporary versifiers...'⁵⁸ To some extent, the Curnow suggestion that 'good verse' can be written only when the author is involved in an exclusivist career as an 'artist' is then mirrored by Harris' choice of text, when she proceeds to concentrate solely on the poetry from *Shingle-Short* in her thesis. Yet while it is true that the financially independent Baughan chose to prioritise her writing after she arrived in New Zealand, a study of the correspondence concerning the spiritual and humanitarian issues that became increasingly important to her, indicates that poetry came to occupy less and less of her time. The suspension of Baughan's verse, along with the privileging of alternative conversations, will be considered in detail in the third chapter of this thesis.

Is it even possible, then, to tell a different story of Baughan, to chip away at a discourse which seems so firmly cemented in place, and to position her within different frameworks? Joanna Russ continues her chapter on marginalised writers, noting that: '...the real mischief of the myth of the isolated achievement, as it is applied to the "wrong writers," is that the criteria of selection *are in themselves loaded* and so often lead to the choice of whatever in the writer's work will reinforce the stereotypical notion of what women can write or should write.'⁵⁹ What Curnow chooses to identify in his reading of 'A Bush Section' posits Baughan as the forerunner of the cultural nationalist narrative. However, such a reading only recognises one possibility, and by investigating different material and reading outside the masculinist framework, it is possible to access a further network of conversations

⁵⁷ Harris, p.63.

which provide a very different picture of her. What the archives and Harris' biographical information tell us about Baughan, in fact, is that she was not simply poet, but also novelist, short-story writer, correspondent, journalist, friend, confidante, feminist, nature-mystic, tourism promoter, and, above all, spiritual seeker and social reformist.

Throughout her life Baughan prioritised a discourse consisting of multiple conversations, a colloquy that would later become entirely foreign in a time and place where the cultural nationalists favoured visions of the isolated and suffering poet alienated in a hostile colony. Such a network of dialogues seems to invert the singular masculinist discourse so directly that it must also open the possibility for new interpretations of other old stories. What the following three chapters in this thesis aim to demonstrate is that reading Baughan as a representative of this alternative model provides New Zealand literature with a narrative which is the very antithesis of cultural nationalism. Beginning with Baughan's roaming existence as 'vagabond' and discussing issues replicated in both her prose and personal correspondence, the first of her conversations to be considered is the literary dialogue.

⁵⁸ Harris, p.80.

⁵⁹ Russ, p .65.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY DIALOGUE

1. Baughan as Vagabond

That Baughan did indeed recognise isolation as a problem for those around her is apparent not only in the poem 'A Bush Section,' but also in her other writing. Textual evidence in *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven*, a prose work reported to give more than adequate representation of a number of local people that Baughan knew, namely through 'studies of colonial character that had greatly impressed her,'¹ includes their mixed reactions to life in colonial New Zealand. Thinly disguised in fictional 'slice of life' stories, the characters depicted are the direct result of Baughan's walking into the landscape, 'talking, reporting on experience.'² These travelling, walking and reporting females have been seen as representing the 'paradigm of the vagabonding woman,'³ and *Brown Bread* is, in effect, a literary reconstruction of Baughan's own particular type of 'vagabonding.' In Baughan's text this lifestyle is named explicitly and positively: 'Her heart was the heart of a fellow-vagabond. It understood.'⁴ The stories represent her varied interpretations of what life in the early days of the colony was like, and faithfully replicate the character, attitude and lifestyle of the people she met. From the examples Baughan gives, it is clear that gender made little difference in the general need to feel 'at home,' and that despite becoming a masculinist preoccupation in later literature, colonial women were no less likely than men to be

¹ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS Papers 198, Wtu.

² Leggott, p.275.

³ Leggott, p.275.

affected by being cast out in a tiny isolated corner of the world, in 'Bush, and nothin' but Bush, for what looked like miles...'⁵ The accuracy of her depictions is reflected in the text *New Zealand Women in the 19th Century*, where Sheryll Ofner has collected short biographies and epistolary excerpts on the lives of early colonial women. Thus, when settler Sarah McMurray, a pioneer wife ensconced on a Westland farm, describes her own isolated circumstances in a matter-of-fact letter to her mother, she also helps to verify the general picture that Baughan draws: 'I have been here six months next Sunday and have only been away once ... I began to think that you had all quite forgotten there were such people as us in the world.'⁶

Baughan's unpublished novel, *Two New Zealand Roses*, also makes reference to similar colonial attitudes, initially depicting a 'Home' located nostalgically in England, while the colonised country and its unpopulated 'dark dreadful Bush'⁷ are made to appear hostile and unsatisfactory: 'Even to-day, when everything else was so extra shining, the light in there was only grenny(sic)-gloomy, and all you could see was bare bony Fuschia-boughs like reddish bare arms, sprawling about over bare black rocks...'⁸ Consequently, it seems at first that the attitudes of the cultural nationalist project are being reinforced in her texts: Baughan is adamant about the difficulties that need to be overcome in colonial existence, and as the old grandmother in one anecdote from *Brown Bread* states: 'It was hard on mother, mind you! In them days it was just about as bad as dyin', in one way, to come out to the Colonies. For you left all your friends behind you, an' you knew you could never get back no more

⁴ 'Pipi on the Prowl,' *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven*, p.13. Hereafter this text is referred to as *BBCO*.

⁵ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, p.16.

⁶ Sheryll Ofner, letter excerpt from *New Zealand Women in the 19th Century*, p.26.

⁷ *Two New Zealand Roses*, p.25. Hereafter this text is referred to as *TNZR*.

⁸ *TNZR*, p.15.

to see 'em.'⁹ Ofner, too, in her discussion of the different representations of the early settler women, endorses this portrayal of female colonial existence: '...the immortalised image of "pioneer woman" does not reflect the reality of colonial life for many female settlers. It does not tell us...about the loneliness women...experienced during their husband's absences; the cultural barrenness...problematic marriages, poverty, homesickness, drudgery or the ill-health that led to...death...'¹⁰ Perhaps women were not so often found working alone on the land, but rural isolation, the separation from British foundations and family, and the absence of a true sense of community were factors that appeared to affect them as habitually as the men they often accompanied to the colonies: 'An' now here she was, come out to live in a one-roomed hut at this God-forsaken last end o' nowhere, right the other side the world...'¹¹

However, although Baughan acknowledges these problems, both *Brown Bread* and *Two New Zealand Roses* deliver a principal contrast with the typical picture of colonial life. The difference is a sentiment that comes through the stories at least as regularly as the tenets of loneliness and solitude, and is derived from the pervading sense of camaraderie that Baughan appears to have discovered through her vagabonding. It is an uncertain narrative, by no means continuous, yet the suggestion of companionship and intimacy between women, of both the Pakeha and Maori cultures, lays the foundations for a new conversation. In writing that introduces the issue of fellowship, Baughan highlights a colloquy that is absent from the usual historical record of women's lives. The texts also reflect her own life; firstly in the sense that the women in *Brown Bread* present a structure of matrix which mirrors

⁹ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, p.17.

the literary community surrounding her; secondly, through the way in which the friendship of the two 'Roses' and the issues confronting them, replicate her own close female relationships. Her prose, then, with its 'suggestions of support, nurture and numerousness,'¹² represents a similar support structure to that which she herself was involved in. With this in mind, the first section of this chapter will consider some of the representations of colloquy and female intimacy to be found in *Two New Zealand Roses*, and in *Brown Bread*, considering the way this dialogue is used to combat, or at least reduce, the terrors of colonial life. The second section will then look at the infrastructures of female support that Baughan developed in her own life, through the construction of a personal literary colloquy. It will also consider the sense of audience that this creation of female matrix achieved, most specifically by way of contrast with what Curnow would later describe as 'The singularity of the artist or critic in New Zealand...[his] simple unpleasant crippling loneliness.'¹³

2. Offering Alternatives - Baughan's Prose Representations of Colonial Women

'Grandmother Speaks,' in *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven*, is a short story that integrates the recognisable problems of alienation with a new focus on communication and colloquy. A portrayal of early colonial life written in the

¹⁰ Ofner, p.25.

¹¹ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, p.17.

¹² Leggott, p.267.

demotic tone of the confessional, it suggests that what Baughan saw and heard in her vagabonding role led her to the belief that, emotionally at least, settler life was often more difficult for women than it was for men. In a discussion of gender roles, the grandmother explains the position of rural women tied to the farms by their domestic duties, whilst husbands, fathers and brothers were able to travel more regularly to townships, maintaining more regular contact with the slowly developing civilisation: '...some o' the men 'ud go away in a whaleboat up to Town...' ¹⁴ Her recollections concentrate most often on a monotony of routine, the intensive and difficult labour that was a regular part of life for many women, and the lack of human contact made all the more absolute because of the isolation from regular postal services: 'But the women, with all the cookin' an' cleanin' an' clothin' to do...an' they a-grievin' for them they'd left behind, an' scarce ever a letter: an' all the change ever *they* got, just to look from the Bush to the sea an' then back from the sea to the Bush...' ¹⁵ Yet in the same story Baughan also begins to construct a portrait of the picture that was developing slowly, and perhaps inevitably, between the women thrust into Pakeha isolation, and Maori women on the Pa. ¹⁶

Aside from Baughan's rendition of Maori legend in her poem 'Maui's Fish,' her writing shows little involvement in Maori language or culture. However, the representation of various characters in *Brown Bread* seems to indicate that in her vagabonding she had experienced something of Maori life. In 'Grandmother Speaks,' the interaction is initiated largely from a Christian desire to help the 'heathen' Maori,

¹³ Curnow, 'A Dialogue with Ngaio Marsh,' *LBH*, p.78.

¹⁴ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, p.17.

¹⁵ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, pp.19-20.

¹⁶ Ofner writes: 'A number of middle-class wives quickly became fluent speakers of Te Reo Maori and took a strong interest in Maori welfare. Because of their mastery of the Maori language, these women found themselves useful as interpreters, translators, proofreaders and sometimes writers.' p.45.

and although the prose recognises cultural difference, the tension gradually gives way to an affiliation and consolidation which appears to be based largely on gender. It is also a scene where a sense of humour helps to transcend the boundaries of race, assisting with the development of a camaraderie between the Pakeha mother, and the Maori woman, named Roimata:

Roimata an' mother was a-talking' friendly together that afternoon, Roimata, she says, quite innocent, 'An' how many men,' she says, '*you* had?'... 'Why, one, of course, an' that my own lawful wedded husband!' cries mother, a-bridlin' an' a-bristlin' of herself till she didn't look like the same woman... 'E! too much the lie!' she says, an' looked so sure, that mother she gave up bein' angry all of a sudden an' just burst out a-laughin.¹⁷

The interplay in Baughan's stories can sometimes remain more awkward than this: in 'Pipi on the Prowl,' a story reportedly initiated by Baughan's conversations with an extremely old Maori woman living on Banks Peninsula,¹⁸ a slightly more antagonistic attitude is expressed: '...it is well known that *pakehas* have as a rule only pebbles in their eye-sockets - they see nothing; while their ears, on the other hand, are as *kokota*-shells, to hold whatever you please to put in.'¹⁹

The difficulty of linguistic interchange between cultures is not always easy to overcome, but while language proves an initial barrier in some stories, these problems are usually defeated in other ways. 'Aboard a Coasting Schooner' is a short piece

¹⁷ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, p.25.

¹⁸ In an interview with Harris, Mrs M.A. Skey notes: 'I remember being taken with 'Aunt Betty' [Baughan] to visit an old Maori woman on the peninsula...' 'Aunt Betty' used to take her a supply of vegetables in return for getting lessons in Maori and stories about the early days on the peninsula...' Harris, p. 251.

¹⁹ 'Pipi on the Prowl,' *BBCO*, p.7.

which probably represents one of Baughan's own shipboard journeys,²⁰ and in it she writes of the traveller's experiences with Maori women, both living on the Pa, and in other areas isolated from the initial influx of Pakeha settlers: '...the owners had ridden in from their scattered homes at the first word of the *Tikirau's* approach; many of the women squatted in conversational groups upon the sand and puffed at short black pipes...' ²¹ As Baughan demonstrates, issues of language did not often seem to remain a prohibitive factor in inter-racial communication between women; instead, gesture, and obvious overtures of geniality and friendship were prominent: 'Of my many hostesses, I remember especially one...She made me heartily welcome...with outstretched hands full of baked *karaka* kernels, and a flood of talk and gestures. The talk, unhappily, I could not understand at all...but the friendliness was irresistible: we squatted down side by side and entered into a brisk exchange of smiles.'²²

This type of camaraderie was not simply limited to Baughan's experiences with Maori. Throughout *Brown Bread*, friendliness is the quality most often accentuated by the determination to displace isolation. In 'Spring in Autumn,' Catherine, a Pakeha wife, addresses conversation to a visitor who has come to spend the day at her very isolated farm: 'Come along, then, through this - gate, I was going to say; only, you can see for yourself it is not, properly speaking, quite a gate, as yet.'²³ The continual chatter, ever-present hospitality, and 'the kind and pressing invitation to "stay to dinner"' ²⁴ show her desire to speak to another woman, and perhaps simply to someone other than her husband: 'It is always a treat to Catherine, brought up as she

²⁰ Berta Burns notes of Baughan: 'She had always adored the sea and travelled extensively on it most of her life.' Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

²¹ 'Aboard a Coasting Schooner,' *BBCO*, p.45.

²² 'Aboard a Coasting Schooner,' *BBCO*, pp.70-71.

²³ 'Spring in Autumn,' *BBCO*, p.103.

²⁴ 'Spring in Autumn,' *BBCO*, p.112.

was in the bustle of a town, and inevitably missing it a little now and then, to see a fresh face; and her tongue runs on “as if it had just been oiled.”²⁵ While it is clear that the lack of conversational possibilities affects both men and women (“Beautiful mornin,’ ain’t it?” he went on eagerly, as though he longed above all things to speak, and feared to lose the chance of doing so²⁶), it is the female characters, otherwise adrift in their loneliness and drudgery, who most often make the effort to develop a sense of community.

A similar loneliness is evident at the outset of *Two New Zealand Roses*, where Baughan describes the nostalgia of a generation still longing for Britain. Within the first twenty pages she provides numerous illustrations of the unfriendly bush and landscape characteristic of colonial New Zealand, and locates her story firmly ‘near the sea-side end of the gully, on the wild New Zealand coast...a tiny isolated bit of the world.’²⁷ The narrative of the child protagonist Rosy Bennett²⁸ becomes representative of an entire generation hankering for ‘Home’: ‘...a Midsummer Christmas wasn’t properly no Christmas at all, ‘cause Gentle-Jesus had got Himself born in mid-winter, and that was the way Christmas always was at home in England - “Home, Home sweet sweet Home,” that wonderful country the other side of the sea.’²⁹ The parameters of colonial life are constantly being measured against the perennial ‘RIGHT place!’³⁰ and Baughan, having emigrated from Britain, expresses the irony she feels in Rosy’s cry: ‘...O dear, what a lot of translating you had to do, when you

²⁵ ‘Spring in Autumn,’ *BBCO*, p.109.

²⁶ ‘An Early Morning Walk,’ *BBCO*, p.118.

²⁷ *TNZR*, p.2.

²⁸ The title of *Two New Zealand Roses* is derived from the names of the novel’s two protagonists, Rosy Bennett and Rosamund Royal.

²⁹ *TNZR*, p.20.

³⁰ *TNZR*, pp. 41-42.

lived in New Zealand, where March was Autumn instead of Spring! You'd have to say "Tui" for "Swallow", and even the dear daffodils didn't seem to be really right.'³¹

However, these difficulties are overcome through the same camaraderie that is evident in Baughan's short stories. This is first seen in the deep and permanent female friendship which is established between the two young 'Roses.' As they develop into adulthood and their relationship strengthens, they become part of a new focus: 'It was a time of seething. Even in this little distant Colony, doubts, dissensions, innovations of all kinds were in the air...the coat and skirt had ousted the bustle, daughters were revolting on every side, and New Zealand were going to give women the vote.'³² Although the earnest longing out of which the old 'Home' is constructed creates a reluctance to accept this 'perilous hostile place,' the colony is depicted as a place of empowerment for suffrage issues and for facilitating debate. The mutual dialogue of support that cements the inseparable relationship of 'the two roses' instigates discussion on issues of gender, nature, local art, religion and education: '...he had insisted on her being equipped with all the education that New Zealand could provide, woman though she was, and unwilling though she might be.'³³ This same friendship, when interrupted for a long period by the war, emphasises the colonial reliance on the linking power of correspondence: '...from another pocket, the precious envelope was drawn, and the precious sheet displayed.'³⁴ Reading Baughan's own prodigious personal correspondence, it is apparent that her exchange of letters provided the main method of communication in the colloquy which was so

³¹ *TNZR*, p.139.

³² *TNZR*, p.183.

³³ *TNZR*, p. 177.

³⁴ *TNZR*, p. 261.

important to her. Thus, the dialogues that *Two New Zealand Roses* investigate are replicated in the conversations between Baughan and her own friends.

Discussing the plight of a lonely and somewhat unusually inept character in a story from *Brown Bread*, Baughan sums up her perception of the attitude of the colonial woman: 'The other women of the settlement were good to her; it is a man's mistake to think that women will not stand by each other...'³⁵ Perhaps the best representation of her profound admiration for so many colonial women is expressed in the words of the old grandmother, when she says of her forebears: 'I didn't think of it then, nor understand, but many's the time since I've thought, an' I reckon them women had *pluck*!'³⁶ It should be made clear at this point, that *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven* and *Two New Zealand Roses* do not disprove the pictures of colonial life that have become so much a part of New Zealand's literary history, but neither do they exactly replicate them. Rather, the text encourages the emergence of a new understanding of the colonial woman, by highlighting some of the ways in which they began to construct a sense of community from their isolated existence. For Baughan, at least, the consequences of her vagabonding are such that the loneliness of rural settlement and the geographical displacement so dominant in many depictions of colonial life are relegated to positions of less importance in her texts. The new constant among these women is, instead, cooperation, communication, and a sense of togetherness: the outcome of this, the foundation of a matrix. The next task, then, is to consider the way in which a similar structure can be realised as a part of Baughan's own life.

³⁵ 'The Mountain Track,' *BBCO*, p.172.

³⁶ 'Grandmother Speaks,' *BBCO*, p.20.

3. Baughan's Conversations with Ursula Mary Bethell and Jessie Mackay, and the Creation of a Critical Audience

In 1857, a letter from a woman named Mary Taylor, to her English friend Charlotte Bronte, drew attention to one of the problems of her early settler life in New Zealand: 'Do you know that living among people with whom you have not the slightest interest in common is just like living alone, or worse...I never see a human being to whom it would ever occur to me to mention anything I read to them...' ³⁷ However, the suffragist movement during the 1890s was to help alter this, ³⁸ and a constant fixture throughout Baughan's life was the dialogue she immersed herself in with literary friends and acquaintances in both Canterbury, and the wider country. In acknowledging these conversations, then, the investigation of archival material uncovers the existence of a social reality different to that posited by the cultural nationalists. It has already been noted that, although she chose to leave Britain and come to New Zealand of her own accord, Baughan actually knew no-one on her arrival here. However, she was quick to make friends, and, as intimate nicknames, correspondence, dedications, and collaborative publishing boycotts suggest, to begin constructing a network which would provide support for two of the most vital things in her life: her writing and her search for spiritual peace. Nancy Harris notes, too, that 'Baughan was too extroverted a person to be isolated,' ³⁹ naming among her friends the

³⁷ Ofner, p.33.

³⁸ Ofner writes: 'One issue that drew together feminists who aimed for social purity with women outside the WTCU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] was the campaign for women's suffrage. Demands for female franchise began as early as 1850.' p. 88.

³⁹ Harris, p.12.

‘versifying’ Cabot sisters (Dolce Cabot edited the ‘Women’s Page’ of *The Canterbury Times*), writer Johannes Andersen, and poet Jessie Mackay, who later took over from Cabot at the paper. This type of writing connection initiated a useful paradigm, one that seemed to be especially important in female circles. Thus, despite the less visible position of women in mid-century New Zealand writing, Patrick Evans writes that: ‘[In 1933] Jane Mander had returned to the country after two years overseas and settled in Auckland, where she too encouraged younger writers. In Christchurch Blanche Baughan did the same, and Jessie Mackay, who after the war had moved onto the Cashmere hills, where Ursula Bethell was to make her home, continued the area’s tradition of cultural activity.’⁴⁰

In the Macmillan Brown Library archives, a collection of letters from Baughan to Christchurch poet Ursula Mary Bethell, testifies to a particular friendship and a lasting affection based on their mutual literary and spiritual interests. Writing about Bethell and the various friendships she developed, Rosemary Brewer notes that her relationships with her female companions were unusually intense:

...Bethell’s relationships with Duggan and Baughan...were based on common interests...Books were important, and much discussed, as was religion. But these were not pupils, nor proteges. They were women friends, and the difference - for Bethell - is relationships which are more intimate, more personal, ones in which she is, in a way, more vulnerable.⁴¹

Despite this kind of potential vulnerability, Baughan seemed only to gain in strength from her friendships with other women - people with whom she discussed equally numerous subjects, and from whom she too drew spiritual and literary support. The

⁴⁰ Evans, p.75.

closeness that Brewer mentions is clear from the tone of Baughan's correspondence. In a letter fragment sent to Bethell at the beginning of summer she writes: 'I hope the flats (sic) are all behaving, Robin in the pink, Michael observing total abstinence from "bidi-bids," the garden a glory and Abbé at work and at peace.'⁴² Although there is no specific reference in these particular letters to Baughan having visited Rise Cottage in the Cashmere hills where Bethell lived, the casual mention of the garden, and of Michael the cat, suggest that she was, at least at one time, a guest; Bethell certainly visited Baughan in Akaroa. Brewer picks up on the names as 'a private code among women friends...a gesture of affection,'⁴³ but there is more to the nicknames than simply fun. 'Abbé,' in particular, as Brewer remarks, 'a title of respect for any ecclesiastic or clergyman,' makes reference to the spiritual issues that were at all times a common concern between these two women.

It was a general similarity of attitude to religious thought and activity which privileged this friendship above some others. Brewer writes of Bethell's poetry: '...the fundamentally religious nature of her work, particularly of the two later collections, has been named, but often given less attention than it deserves.'⁴⁴ Although Bethell was a devout member of the Church of England, Baughan had abandoned her own Anglican upbringing early in life: 'I, myself, have never been able to accept dogmatic Christianity since girlhood, when I lost all faith in it, with a consequent agony indescribable.'⁴⁵ However, her continued interest in all types of

⁴¹ Rosemary Brewer, *A Pilgrim in the Library*, MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1995, p.67.

⁴² Letter from Baughan to Bethell, November 26, no year, MS 38, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury. Hereafter the Macmillan Brown is referred to as MBL.

⁴³ Brewer, p.29.

⁴⁴ Brewer, p.9.

⁴⁵ Winslow Hall, *Recorded Illuminates*, p.80.

religion, and increasingly in eastern Vedantic thought,⁴⁶ encouraged an ongoing dialogue about spirituality and alternative forms of devotion between the two women. In 1936 Baughan wrote to Bethell expressing her ongoing frustration with the earthly existence, obviously conscious that Bethell's commitment to the church, and to the concept of salvation, would make her a discerning and attentive listener: 'The last day of the old year and someday there will come also the last day of our earth-years. Yet what real significance, what reality has either day?...Our death out of the body and out of our poor little brains and tiny little experiences and interpretations will be just as lacking in reality.'⁴⁷ Discussing Bethell's poetry, critic Trevor James cites a similar indifference to mundane reality, and bases his interpretations on the fact that she was so well-read in 'devotional and mystical literature.'⁴⁸ He writes: '...in the poem "Midnight" she uses the empty landscape to suggest the stages of purgation that must precede union with God...inherent...is her belief in a spiritual community and a divine absolute which transcends finite experience.'⁴⁹ What becomes clear, then, is that these two women, despite their mutual love of writing, were happy to privilege a different dialogue far ahead of that embodied in the earthly, and thus secondary, existence as poet. Scribbled hastily in the top corner of the same 1936 letter from Baughan, and heavily underlined, are the words 'Art is the apprenticeship of the Saint': both Bethell and Baughan perceived an intrinsic and correlative connection between creativity and spirituality, but the ultimate objective was always the achievement of spiritual enlightenment.

⁴⁶ This facet of Baughan's life will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ Letter from Baughan to Bethell, December 31, 1936, MS 38, MBL.

⁴⁸ Trevor James, 'Religious Awareness in New Zealand Poetry: A Problem for the Imagination,' *World Literature Written in English*, p.430.

⁴⁹ James, p.431.

In a relationship heightened by their shared affiliation with poetry and mysticism, Baughan and Bethell also had a mutual love of nature, and expressed this communion through both verse and correspondence. Bethell is well-known for her small hillside garden in Cashmere (her 'small fond human enclosure'⁵⁰) and for her gardening poems. Although she writes often of the New Zealand bush, Baughan did not leave a legacy of garden poems, but Berta Burns writes at length on this aspect of Baughan's personality, and notes the following of her green-fingered touch: 'Her garden...was truly her great joy and love. Although she knew little of New Zealand gardening, her garden always came up trumps, in spite of many unorthodox plantings...If there was one thing in life that gave her happiness it was sharing her flowers.'⁵¹ Baughan's letters, too, reveal that gardening was as much a shared bond between herself and Bethell as the poetry they wrote. Thus, she writes again to her friend one early summer, rhapsodizing over the beauty of a laburnum tree: '...it bends down and blesses all and sundry with fresh blossom (O! what lovely words...but O! how much more lovely a fact!) O dear me, if earth were only peopled by humanity and not by nature too, what would such as me do!'⁵² It is also evident that the two women perceived a continuity between poetry and nature. Baughan regularly exchanged books of verse with Bethell, and developed her own appropriate and very personal way of appreciating the poems that her friend had written: 'I want to go out among the hills and read "Autumn Afternoon" again, on a low hillock, contented, contented. I do love that thing of yours, Abbé dear! It has to me the very health (sic) of a Canterbury Autumn.'⁵³

⁵⁰ Bethell, 'Pause,' Bornholdt *et al*, p.452.

⁵¹ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

⁵² Letter from Baughan to Bethell, November 2, no year, MS 38, MBL.

⁵³ Letter from Baughan to Bethell, March 9, 1937, MS 38, MBL.

Baughan continued this procedure of poetic exchange with other writers, and an early letter to her long-time friend Johannes Andersen suggests that she was not shy either of asking for criticism, or of meting it out. A 1908 letter written from Chorlton, emphasises her ability to look objectively at her own work:

I hasten to answer, gratefully, your long & kind criticism of Sh. Sh. [*Shingle-Short*] I laughed over your turning the tables on me as to longwindedness - you are quite right too!...the "garrulity" annoys me - & yet I somehow couldn't manage to take the tucks in. I shall have to have another look - Brrrr it will become my duty to read the book - I read the proofs & reckoned that would last me lifetime!⁵⁴

Obviously, Baughan preferred the opinion of others to the job of re-reading her own printed material, and the preface to *Shingle-Short* itself acknowledges her receptiveness to any criticism by her peers: 'I also wish to record in this place my deep gratitude to several generous and helpful critics: namely Miss Jessie Mackay, and Dr Hight in this country...' In a reciprocal gesture, the frontispiece to Mackay's collection *Land of the Morning*, reads: 'I would fain convey my heartfelt gratitude, also, to those authors, editors, and friends whose kindly encouragement has meant so much to me. Especially would I thank Mrs. Edith Searle Grossmann, Miss Edith I. Lyttelton, Miss B.E. Baughan, and Mr A.G. Stephens for their valuable help and advice.' These pages do more than simply communicate thanks, in that they act as an additional record of this developing network of support and friendship.

The relationship with Jessie Mackay was reportedly an influential one from early in Baughan's poetic career:

⁵⁴ Letter from Baughan to Johannes Andersen, August 9, 1908, MS 7, The Auckland Institute and Museum Library. Hereafter this is referred to as AML.

Her friendship with Jessie Mackay was significant during her production of the *Shingle-Short* poems. The intimate nature of some of the allusions in 'The Eternal Children', the long poem in that volume addressed 'To Jessie Mackay', suggests that their friendship was a close one. They had much in common: both were poets, both were enthusiasts for an indigenous culture, both took an active interest in social causes, both were feminists, both were intensely religious - though in different ways - and both were unmarried...⁵⁵

Berta Burns, in her memoirs of Baughan, recommends a reading of 'The Eternal Children,' and also states that 'Mackay was a great personal friend of B.E.B until her death.'⁵⁶ However, Baughan destroyed much of the private mail she had received during her life sometime before she died; for research purposes it is thankful that she herself was a good correspondent, and that so many of those to whom she wrote have kept her letters for historical reference. Mackay apparently did not; as Brewer notes in her thesis, rumour has it that Mackay burnt her own papers somewhere on the Port Hills.⁵⁶ However, during the research for this thesis, and although there is no official archive, new documentation pertaining to and collected by Mackay and her family was made available to me.⁵⁷ Some of it is related to Baughan, and other writers that Mackay knew, and from this it has been possible to extract and add a few extra pieces of information to supplement the limited knowledge of their personal dialogue.

People who read *Shingle-Short* are soon made aware from a dedication that Baughan wrote 'The Eternal Children' for Mackay: it is perhaps not so well-known that Mackay returned the compliment, and dedicated a poem to Baughan, entitled 'October in New Zealand.' It was printed in full in *The Evening Star* in 1934, with

⁵⁵ Harris, p.12.

⁵⁶ Brewer writes: '...the rumour is that at some point Mackay's papers were taken out on to the hillside at Cashmere and burned. There is certainly no Mackay archive.' p. 67.

⁵⁷ This material is currently in the possession of Iona Wells and her family in Christchurch. For footnoting purposes, it will be referred to as the Mackay Papers.

the dedication 'To B.E.B,' and constituted part of a gracious testimonial to Mackay and her prolific output of poetry. The poem itself is recognisably in Mackay's voice ('October will ride in a mantle o' the vair,/ With the flower o' the quince in her *dew-wet hair*;/ October will ride to the gates of the day,/ With the bluebells ringing on her maiden way; -/ For October, October's the lady of the year!'), the same voice which was later to receive Curnow's less than favourable criticism. The specifically romanticised nature of this poem actually raises an interesting paradox, in that Baughan, who is herself later recognised for the masculinist attributes in her writing, was expected to appreciate it. Obviously though, Mackay felt confident that the style would appeal to Baughan, while W.F Alexander, the author of the testimonial, praises the verses highly and adds an additional bracketed comment: '(It is pleasant to know that those last verses were addressed to Miss B.E Baughan; no fewer than three women poets, these two and the late Miss Colborne-Veel, have brought distinction on Christchurch.)'⁵⁸ Women were writing for women, and where Baughan may have been later classified as the forerunner of cultural nationalist tendencies, one needs only to read this poem, and 'The Eternal Children,' to understand how different were many of her other preoccupations.

Poetry was the predominant factor early in this friendship, and, as with Bethell, it appears that books were again exchanged. In the Mackay Papers are two slim books, one a copy of Baughan's *Reuben and Other Poems*. More enlightening than the actual item itself, however, are the inscriptions to be found in faded ink on the inside covers. The first, in *Reuben*, reads: 'To Miss Jessie Mackay. With heartiest good wishes from B.E. Baughan. April 1907.' The second book in the papers is an original

⁵⁸ Article in *The Evening Star*, Saturday 15 December, 1934.

and well-worn copy of Baughan's 1917-18 travel booklet, *Akaroa*. Ten years after Jessie's death in 1938, Baughan was clearly still very much in contact with the family, for *Akaroa*, addressed to Jessie's sister, Georgina, reads: 'To G. Mackay. With the author's love. Christmas. 1948.' Further testament to a dialogue of female support and literary scholarship, this type of dedication helps to reveal the spreading pattern of Baughan's relationships.

However, regardless of their poetic association, it is probable that Baughan and Jessie Mackay would have come into contact eventually in a community as small as Christchurch: a diary entry from Mackay states that she 'Went to Sumner,' and 'Saw B.E.B on the beach.'⁵⁹ In addition, and like Bethell, Mackay saw more to her friend than simply the masculinist and idealised vision of the long-suffering poet, and the two women had far more in common than just verse. Both Baughan and Mackay had been heavily involved in the suffragist movements of their respective countries (the 'time of seething' that Baughan identifies in *Two New Zealand Roses*) and shared an interest in religious issues and humanitarian concerns. Jessie and her sister Georgina also appear to have been interested in the travel prose and scenic guide booklets that Baughan produced. A newspaper clipping from *The Press*, undated, but again saved in the Mackay Papers, shows another copy of 'Our Literary Corner,' containing an article written by Baughan called 'A Ramble on the Port Hills.' (Presumably, Mackay shared some affinity for the Canterbury area, since she had herself been born in the Rakaia Gorge, in South Canterbury.) Baughan's rambles, however, usually involved miles and miles of hard walking; and a photo in Harris' thesis of her clinging to a rockface in Victorian dress acknowledges them as the athletic, as well as literary

⁵⁹ Diary entry, Monday 11 January, 1926, Mackay Papers.

achievement that they were for a woman of her time. Another undated article from the Christchurch *Press* notes of the most famous of these pieces: “‘The Finest Walk in the World’...made history of two kinds, literary and tourist. It was a pioneer publicity effort, and fixed an association in the public mind, that to the best of my belief, has not been paralleled.’⁶⁰ The bonus from this work, too, is that her reports on New Zealand’s natural beauty were to yield Baughan a certain amount of income from sales to English newspapers, remuneration that both she and Mackay were eminently in favour of.

The most public dimension of the dialogue between the two resulted from this mutual effort to create a fair publishing ground for local writers. Nancy Harris writes that ‘[Baughan’s] friendship with Jessie Mackay, the spearhead of the national literary movement of the 1890s, and a regular contributor and critic for the NZIM [*New Zealand Illustrated Magazine*], was formative in promoting the *idea* of a national literature’⁶¹; also that Baughan herself was ‘acutely conscious of the uniqueness of a colonial literature.’⁶² In addition to the books which both women wrote, part of this desire to establish a new style of writing particular to New Zealand involved ensuring regular publication of local verse and prose in the regional and national newspapers. It was a plan designed to raise levels of public awareness and appreciation. Discussing the possibility that her book *Shingle-Short* might actually sell out, Baughan wrote to Johannes Andersen: ‘...once convince people that some verse, at any rate, will sell, will be read, and you improve the market: and once get them to read any verse and they will perhaps read more and other and better.’⁶³ Baughan had

⁶⁰ Article in *The Press*, by Cyrano, undated, MS 198, Wtu.

⁶¹ Harris, p.37.

⁶² Harris, p.64.

⁶³ Letter from Baughan to Johannes Andersen, August 9, 1908, MS 7, AML.

received substantial payments for her contributions to journals and other British publications, and, while her work was in some demand, she was unimpressed by the scanty amounts paid by the Canterbury newspaper: 'Why we should fill their columns for nothing, I do not see...' "Gathering Peaches" and "Early Days" were both a handsome present to the C[anterbury]Times on my part: very handsome too, since for 3 verses that were the nucleus of "E.D" the London Spectator had given me ½ a guinea a verse: and quite involuntary, since I didn't know the C.T custom!'⁶⁴ It is clear that the problem of low payment was not one limited simply to the papers, however, and the money produced from sales of *Brown Bread*, at least, was equally low. As Nancy Harris notes: 'For the years of work involved in the production of her prose sketches *Brown Bread From a Colonial Oven*, she was paid only five pounds - for the whole edition.'⁶⁵

As women of independent means not actually required to earn their living from their writing, Baughan and Mackay aimed instead to get reasonable recompense for their efforts, and, perhaps more importantly, to raise levels of respect for local writing, and consequently for a New Zealand literature. The collaborative plot to boycott those papers that continued to refuse remuneration for literary efforts was instigated largely by Baughan and Mackay, and aided by Andersen. In a long letter to him, Baughan explained their intent in typical fashion:

...we have resolved to let nothing of ours to be printed without pay. If you will join, I should like, rather, to let some of our editors know this - or rather their syndicates: pointing out that by not paying for verse they are doubly damaging the national literature - they are (1) obliging us to send our exquisite productions to England forsooth! and

⁶⁴ Letter from Baughan to Johannes Andersen, August 9, 1908, MS 7, AML.

⁶⁵ Harris, p.13.

Australie. And (2) they print doggerel, since they needn't pay for it. The Weekly Press Editor wrote and asked me for something for the Xmas No. I replied with my views set out - Result - a very agreeable cheque! It's time something was done!⁶⁶

Their united stand seems to have produced at least limited success, but then in 1938, the year of Mackay's death, local publishers Whitcombe and Tombs were drawn into an extension of this same dialogue, when Ursula Bethell and Eileen Duggan experienced other problems within their local publishing company: 'I am afraid they, that is Whitcombe and Tombs are chary of stocking more than a few copies of a volume of poetry! They are more stationers than booksellers.'⁶⁷ Whilst the papers were reluctant to pay for contributions, the publishing firms seem to have been equally reticent to stock local writing, poetic or otherwise. The year before, Baughan had had her own difficulties getting them to support her small and anonymous prose text, *People in Prison*. As usual, her opinion of Whitcombe and Tombs is expressed to Bethell in no uncertain terms: 'Thanks so much for telling me about W and T not stocking "P in P" ...I fear W and T are hopeless money-grubbers and care only for one's death as a possible advert!!'⁶⁸ Perhaps fortunate not to be solely reliant on writing to provide an income, then, it was even more fortuitous that Baughan managed to establish herself in a community of writing women. With regard to her later efforts involving penal reform, it is hardly surprising that she became a part of this network, for the friendship and support which was an integral part of this dialogue seems to have included a policy of getting things done. Leggott writes of Jessie Mackay, along with Duggan and Hyde: '[They]...were prominent figures...of

⁶⁶ Letter from Baughan to Johannes Andersen, August 9, 1908, MS 7, AML.

generational descent in New Zealand poetry, and they were conscious of the role.’⁶⁹ The same can be said of Baughan. Having firmly incorporated herself in her adopted country, she proved to have both the capacity and the desire to nurture its national literature.

What, then, aside from challenging the dominance of isolation, was the result of this developing literary matrix? The masculinist response to colonial writing has already been discussed in the previous chapter, including the fact that some critics considered the major contribution to the general ‘failure’ of colonial writing to be the lack of a critical audience which would provide discerning and judicious comment. In 1945, Allen Curnow wrote: ‘Having *little sense of an audience*, these writers delivered themselves irresponsibly and inconsequentially. In the “stone-deaf” islands they spoke like the deaf, out of pitch and out of touch with the common converse of the place.’⁷⁰ He adds that it was not until the 1930s, that ‘New Zealand had its own small audience, alert for new poetry,’⁷¹ while in a more recent commentary discussing verse by contemporary New Zealand poet Anne French, MacDonald Jackson states: “‘Eucalypts Greenlane’ achieves satisfactory interrelationships between poet, readers, their common language, and a shared literary tradition...*in nineteenth century New Zealand poetry, such co-operation is hardly ever attained.*”⁷² Thus, the general picture that emerges of writers from the nineteenth century up until the 1930s is one of poets floundering in an abyss of cultural isolation.

⁶⁷ Brewer, pp.86-87. Excerpt of letter from Ursula Bethell to Eileen Duggan, 1938.

⁶⁸ Letter from Baughan to Bethell, April 11, 1937, MS 38, MBL.

⁶⁹ Leggott, p.267.

⁷⁰ Curnow, ‘Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,’ *LBH*, p.146 (my emphasis).

⁷¹ Curnow, ‘Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,’ *LBH*, p.162.

⁷² Jackson, p.344 (my emphasis).

Focussing further on this issue, Curnow recognised the following problem facing New Zealand's poets: 'The real question was not what they were to write *about*, but whom they were to write *for*...' ⁷³ However, the exploration of the dialogue that women like Baughan were involved in goes some way to answering this query. Discussing the poetry of Ursula Bethell, and her habit of enclosing her poems inside correspondence, the *Oxford History* notes that: '...as late as 1984, John Needham found that the women poets were more apt than the men "to speak to someone, rather than address the world at large, or the empty air."' ⁷⁴ As can be seen, the different channels of communication established between Baughan and her friends, and the literary dialogues that are represented in her prose and correspondence, demonstrate the beginnings of a new context within which to read these writing women. In addition, this new narrative interrogates some of the claims since made by Curnow, for if we accept this literary dialogue as one thread from a multiple context, and as an alternative to the cultural nationalist narrative, then there are other critical readings to be found. If a networked literary discourse grounded in colloquy is found to have existed as a part of New Zealand colonial life, as it seems to have done in Baughan's case, then this in turn indicates the existence of at least some sense of audience, and of people to write for. In this instance, the very nature of this conversation, with its specifics of 'nurture and numerousness,' ⁷⁵ indicates the development of a reading public. Curnow notes: 'Poetry requires for its fulfilment two things - a writer and a reader.' ⁷⁶ It is apparent that both these requirements were satisfied among Baughan's poetic intimates, for as has been seen, participants like Mackay, and indeed Baughan

⁷³ Curnow, 'Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*,' *LBH*, p.45.

⁷⁴ Jackson, p.369 (my emphasis).

⁷⁵ Leggott, p. 267.

⁷⁶ Curnow, 'Poets in New Zealand: Problems of Writing and Criticism,' *LBH*, p.7.

herself, were most insistent on acknowledging a critical audience composed of those people in their surrounding literary community. It may of course be suggested that an audience constructed largely from a small circle of acquaintances does not necessarily fulfil the parameters for criticism, or 'the role of [a] qualified representative of the reading public'⁷⁷ which Curnow later saw as beneficial to New Zealand poetry. However, in the face of such objections it should be remembered that much of the critical writing produced by the mid-century generation, material published in magazines like *Phoenix* and *Tomorrow*, came from a similarly small group of acquaintances; for example, in the *Oxford History* Dennis McEldowney cites Bob Lowry writing to Denis Glover, encouraging him to send samples of his work 'for a free crit.'⁷⁸

To all intents and purposes, then, in the absence of a truly global literary culture and in addition to the limited publications they were achieving, New Zealand writing women can be seen as having deliberately constructed their own private and interdependent audience. The exchange of texts, the eagerly awaited opinion of those others participating in the dialogue, and the sincere dedications to those who gave time and advice, suggests that these were writers always ready to adapt their verse to those listening around them. This same practice of creating an audience was also to become something that Baughan utilised to the full in her penal reform work, with its multiple dialogues reaching vastly different areas of the community. Thus, the colonial literary women in their progressive society recognised something the following generation did not: '...the "multiplication" of horizons of expectation, the realization that even in the distant past and in a single society there was no such thing as a single homogeneous

⁷⁷ Curnow, 'Poets in New Zealand: Problems of Writing and Criticism,' *LBH*, p.7.

reading (or listening) public.’⁷⁹ Despite its being concealed behind a dominant narrative that has privileged masculinist ideals, an exploration of the colonial female narrative that existed prior to the growth of cultural nationalism demonstrates that women were empowered by the reformist times in which they lived. Discussing different theories of audience reception, Susan Suleiman comments further: ‘...some works continue to be read by generations and in cultures different from those in which they were written, while others are forgotten for long periods only to be revived at a later time and place.’⁸⁰ As part of a contemporary ‘revival,’ it is notable that Baughan’s literary discourse celebrates this empowerment with its diversity of focus, and the fact that it involves a web of conversations that chose not simply to prioritise the poetic. Thus, the expression of critical poetic opinion, the different issues discussed in her letters to Bethell and Andersen, and the scattered information involving Mackay, become part of a literary dialogue which in turn signposts the way to later and larger areas of engagement. The first of these major conversations, to be considered in the context of the well-known conundrum about why Baughan stopped writing poetry, is her prolific and intense dialogue with Eastern spirituality.

⁷⁸McEldowney, p. 564.

⁷⁹ Susan Suleiman, ‘Introduction: Varieties of Audience Oriented Criticism,’ *The Reader in the Text*, p.37.

⁸⁰ Suleiman, p.35.

CHAPTER III

THE VEDANTA DIALOGUE

1. The Poetic Cessation

The successful sales of *Shingle-Short* demonstrate that there was a steady demand for Baughan's writings, both with the publishers and within her own circle of acquaintances. Yet despite both this and the fact that prior to 1908 Baughan's published literature was largely based in the poetic genre, her early commitment to poetry was to be transitory. While her collection of short stories *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven* came out in 1912, the next and final volume of verse did not emerge until 1923, and was a thin collection actually completed ten years earlier, in 1913. The reasons behind the sudden evaporation of her poetry are not immediately clear. Possessed of her family inheritance, Baughan had largely meagre outgoings,¹ so although Berta Burns suggests that her friend had, at times, to be careful with money, it is not likely to have been financial concerns that encouraged her shift away from poetry and towards the humanitarian concerns that were centred in penal reform. Rosemary Brewer elaborates on this monetary security, when, commenting on the Christchurch based female literary community, she notes that: 'Blanche Baughan, Eileen Duggan, Jessie Mackay, and Bethell herself had no marriage and no children. They had independent incomes, and (for Duggan, Mackay, and for Bethell...) other

¹ Harris notes in her thesis that 'for... ten or so years [Baughan] lived and wrote in a single room in a simple Chorlton farmhouse, and had no other occupation.' p.80.

women in the household who took care of domestic duties.’² The fact that these writers were women, publishing in a colonial social and economic climate that usually called for ‘all hands on deck,’ is in itself somewhat unusual: when discussing the main hindrance to a colonial literature, Monte Holcroft states that it is ‘the absence of a leisured class that makes it necessary for the aspiring author to turn hands and brain to some other task and to save only the dregs of energy for the writing of verse, essays and fiction,’³ while Patrick Evans notes that ‘Poets of this New Zealand-born generation had to find uses (and excuses) for poetry, where the term applied generally to a mere habit of versifying....’⁴ Yet although her later social work belies it, Baughan’s economic independence effectively established her as part of Holcroft’s ‘leisured class,’ and as Brewer concludes, ‘It can be no coincidence that these are women poets who got the writing done.’⁵

Until very recently, then, Baughan has generally been read under the cultural nationalist rubric of ‘poet,’ but one of the difficulties with this perception has been the question of why, with both time and money available, she more or less ceased to write verse after the publication of *Shingle-Short* in 1908. Baughan had spent a good deal of her early life in New Zealand concentrating on her verse, and it is obvious from her letters that the move away from poetry proved to be a huge personal privation: ‘The loss of a husband and ten children would have bereaved me less, believe me! But life is inexorable.’⁶ Contributing to the curiosity value that she has acquired, the seemingly sudden suspension of Baughan’s poetic output has been widely commented on. Several explanations have been put forward, one of these being ill-health. In her

² Brewer, p.73.

³ Holcroft, p.55.

⁴ Evans, p.155.

⁵ Brewer, p.73.

memoirs, Berta Burns refers to Baughan moving house from Chorlton (a small settlement on Banks Peninsula) to Clifton Hill, commenting that: 'By now, for health reasons (she had intermittent throat trouble all her life), she resolved to move to Sumner, proximity to a doctor and altitude being deciding factors.'⁷ Although she found that writing came most easily to her at Chorlton, Baughan's correspondence indicates that the same health reasons which caused her to move from there were also a prevalent factor in the decline of her poetic output. In a letter dated the year before her death, Baughan writes: 'I stayed there (Chorlton) about five years, very happily, but a queer illness ended it, and was thought to be going to end me too. Unluckily it only ended my writing power...'⁸ And in another letter she identifies the same cause: 'Thank you for your very welcome appreciation of my one-time writing...[I've] often wished that that long 1908-9 illness hadn't put a full-stop to it, but it's all long ago now...'⁹

Though she herself claims ill-health as one reason for her poetic cessation, Nancy Harris' thesis talks of a 'creative muse desert[ing]'¹⁰ Baughan, and quotes from a 1937 letter in support of this: '...the poor woman never abandoned poetry. Poetry forsook her...even before the War!'¹¹ Perhaps the most popular idea, however, has been that Baughan made a literary sacrifice in favour of her humanitarian work: in the tribute to her friend, Berta Burns notes that 'by now [1925], her literary activity was quiescent, absorbed as she was by a growing involvement with people on the fringes of

⁶ Letter from Baughan to W.F Alexander, 20 March, 1937, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

⁷ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

⁸ Letter from Baughan to 'Friend' (probably Lincoln Efford), July 21, 1957, MS 132, Box 5/1, MBL.

⁹ Letter from Baughan to Lincoln Efford, October 22, 1956, MS 132, Box 5/1, MBL.

¹⁰ Harris, p.80.

¹¹ Letter from Baughan to W.F Alexander, 20 March, 1937, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

society...'¹² Of Baughan's own explanations, Burns writes: 'She says her writing left her at a certain period, but it was at that period that she started her prison work, and writing was put aside.'¹³ In 1959 Nettie Palmer wrote to Alan Mulgan, also with a corresponding story about Baughan: 'Eileen Duggan told me that B.E.B had given up writing and begun to spend nearly all her energies on helping prisoners...'¹⁴ Similar interpretations have persisted to the present day. Harris acknowledges this change in career path with the comment that 'It was generally assumed that she had "Sacrificed Poetry to Prisoners,"'¹⁵ while in the *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, MacDonald Jackson incorporates all three different explanations: 'After an illness in 1909-1910, Baughan was deserted by her muse and dedicated her life to penal reform.'¹⁶

Yet with the vigour, energy and humour that characterises most of her personal correspondence, Baughan stringently refuted the suggestion by anthologist W.F. Alexander, that she had made a personal sacrifice in favour of humanitarian demands: 'Don't you subscribe to the absurd idea that B.E.B "sacrificed poetry to prisoners"! Nothing of the kind.'¹⁷ Why she felt the need to respond in such a vehement way to Alexander's comment is not immediately apparent, but one explanation is that she resented an observation which implicitly championed the position of art and the artist over that of the 'real' world. Spiritual and humanitarian dialogues were to become increasingly important to Baughan during her life, and, as the previous chapter has shown, the correspondence with fellow poets Bethell and Mackay beginning in

¹² Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

¹³ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

¹⁴ Letter from Nettie Palmer to Alan Mulgan, 7 January, 1959, MS 198, Wtu.

¹⁵ Harris, p.17.

¹⁶ Jackson, p.364.

Baughan's 'literary' phase already indicates an inclusive range of concerns. The suggestion that she had 'sacrificed poetry to prisoners' is representative of the poetic ideals of the cultural nationalist generation; but such privileging of one discourse, even though writing had been of value to her, was clearly unfamiliar to Baughan. The final chapter of this thesis will demonstrate exactly how dominant the penal reform colloquy was to become in her life; but although Baughan had been involved in similar work in London, none of the reasons given for her no longer writing verse, including her own, really help explain the transition back to a life project of such strong humanitarian design. With this in mind, I intend here to examine an alternative dialogue which provides a bridge between writing and penal reform. Confirming the spirituality evident throughout her letters, it also raises the possibility of an extra impetus behind the cessation of poetry.

In her memoirs, Berta Burns mentions Baughan's strong fascination with the eastern religion of Vedanta, noting too, that though 'confirmed as an Anglican, [she]...was not to my knowledge a churchgoer...' ¹⁸ and talking of the first trip she made to meet a spiritual mentor: 'I have not been able to pinpoint the exact date of her journey to America (to California and the Vedanta centres) but it must have been after 1910 and prior to 1914.' In fact, Baughan herself clarifies this period of her life in a late letter:

In 1910 I moved to Clifton above Sumner and stayed 20 years broken only by a year (1914-15) in California where I met with a Hindu monk who taught me the rudiments of meditation...the mysticism of the quakers and the east

¹⁷ Letter from Baughan to W.F Alexander, 20 March, 1937, MS 5751-14, Wtu. In many of her personal letters, Baughan chooses to refer to herself this way, in the third person.

¹⁸ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

attracted me strongly and was a great help to my interior life.¹⁹

Burns elaborates: 'There she found satisfactory answers to her questing soul and *from then on literature became second in her life*...After her contact in California with the Vedanta Swamis, she thereafter practised their attitudes.'²⁰ However, the search to satisfy the 'questing soul' was not to finish in California, for Baughan wrote of the following intention to her friend Johannes Andersen in 1917: 'When the war is over, it is true that I have an idea of going to India for some special purposes of my own; but only, I imagine, for a time, no place like this top of Clifton hill for this chile!'²¹ Such material points to the spiritual quest as an ongoing and substantial part of Baughan's life, and also suggests that her growing involvement with Vedanta, possibly accelerated by her earlier illness, may have impacted on the lack of poetic output after about 1913.

Baughan had in fact already voiced several concerns over poetry somewhat earlier in her career. From 1908 there is clear evidence in her letters that she was becoming frustrated with what she perceived to be the various limitations of poetry. In a letter to her Holloway College teacher, Miss Higgins, she complains of an early dissatisfaction with the formal constraints of traditional versification: 'I once tried a daily ballade, but that's all - I love not the form that keeps so continually demanding attention...I always smell the necessity of the rhyme...I rather incline to the belief that we are in the latter days of rime - except for the pure lyric.'²² It is perhaps this first sense of irritation, and her annoyance at metrical constraint, that has helped define specific pieces of Baughan's poetry as representative of a strongly

¹⁹ Letter from Baughan to 'Friend' (probably Lincoln Efford), 21 July, 1957, MS 132, Box 5/1, MBL.

²⁰ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198 (my emphasis).

²¹ Letter from Baughan to J.C Andersen, December 30, 1917, MS 7, AML.

individualistic style, distinctive amongst what Curnow termed the 'jejune poeticalities' of her generation.²³ Also of note is that throughout her personal correspondence Baughan is self-deprecating about her own poetic work. In a 1908 letter to Johannes Andersen she writes: 'I don't care for the Paddock much ...I almost hate my things, once they are in print I never read them.'²⁴ Similarly, she writes again to Miss Higgins: '...No - I set no store by *Verses* - they were mainly written 10 years ago, and that's a forgotten date. I sent them to you because I'd nothing else.' She continues, discussing one of her most popular texts: 'I set little store by *Shingle-Short* either - tho' I'm personally fond of the name-piece and of the song of the cabbage tree...'²⁵

But it was not just the technical restrictions of poetry that caused Baughan difficulty. In the 1937 letter to Alexander she refers, presumably, to the effects of her earlier illness - '...you have no idea how I have lost the use of words even...' - but then continues: '...or how they now bore me!! Clumsy method of communication, eh?'²⁶ Remarks which represent Baughan's frustration with the mechanical limitations of poetic language, they also indicate her increased privileging of the spiritual conversations that lay outside the material realm of writing.

Two vital and personal transcendental experiences, the first of them in 1905, assisted in initiating the search for, and ongoing dialogue with, the Vedanta religion.

²² Letter from Baughan to Miss Higgins, 11 August, 1909, MS 717/1, Wtu.

²³ Curnow writes: '...nothing about this time compares with... "A Bush Section"... She writes impulsively but under her own disciplines... uncluttered by jejune poeticalities... there is true feeling, not merely the facile optimism of her generation, in the interrogations with which the poem concludes.' 'Introduction to *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,' *LBH*, pp.151-152.

²⁴ Letter from Baughan to Johannes Andersen, 9 August, 1908, MS 7, AML.

²⁵ Letter from Baughan to Miss Higgins, 8 April, 1909, MS 717/1, Wtu.

²⁶ Letter from Baughan to W.F. Alexander, 20 March, 1937, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

In Winslow Hall's book *Recorded Illuminates*, Baughan tells us of the first occurrence:

I was standing among pine trees, looking out at the sky when, suddenly, 'the heavens opened' as it were, and caught me up. I was swept up and out of myself altogether, into a flood of white Glory. I had no sense of time or place. The ecstasy was terrific while it lasted...I found myself bathed with tears, but they were tears of joy. I felt ONE with everything and everybody; and somehow I *knew* that what I had experienced was Reality, and that Reality is Perfection.

I would like to add that no words seem to me able to convey a thousandth part of the *depth* and the *reality* of that Experience...²⁷

A similar illuminatory experience in 1925 left Baughan with an unset broken wrist, and the comment: 'That moment would be well worth breaking my neck to have again.'²⁸ In a later recollection included in her papers, Baughan elaborates on the same feeling of 'Reality' that accompanied this second occurrence: ' Somehow all the things that had seemed evil, wrong, out of place...now were all right: all the little tangles had their answer. Why, it was so simple! Only it had no name in human language. Oneness was part of it, reality another part...a further reality that straightened out everything.'²⁹

Both these reports stress the fact that Baughan found language inadequate to represent the intensity of her experience. And, with this type of encounter in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that in 1909, four years after her initial transcendental encounter, the first specific inkling of inner discontent concerning poetry appears, in

²⁷ Hall, 'B.E.B' excerpt, p.81.

²⁸ Hall, p.84.

²⁹ Excerpt from 'A Broken Wrist,' included with the Baughan Papers, MS 198, Wtu.

the letter to Miss Higgins: 'I feel uncertain as to how far poetry can be written with a moral purpose...' ³⁰ Further on in the much later letter to Alexander, she makes one of her truly revealing statements: 'It [the loss of poetry] didn't mercifully deprive her of the love of Beauty, though...Spite of being a failed poet, then, please believe that I'm doing what I can for mankind by lighting a candle in a dark place it should bring beauty to - also that I'm a very happy woman.' ³¹ In 1937, the 'dark place' she is referring to is the arena of prison reform. This important piece of correspondence, with its significant reference to 'Beauty,' encapsulates a spiritual journey that had really begun as early as 1898, where Nancy Harris notes the transcendental influence behind a poem in *Verses*: "'Death in Life"...conveys a transcendentalist dissolution of the ego, and a total merging with creation at large...' ³²

Clearly, Baughan's mystical experiences had catalysed the search for a greater religious and spiritual depth in her life. The seemingly casual reference to the 'love of Beauty' summarises a significant aspect of her humanitarian work, something that she increasingly realised as unfulfilled by her poetic career; and it emerges that one of the main reasons why poetry may have 'forsaken her,' as she puts it, is that she was uncertain about its ability to enrich her spiritual well-being. According to the evidence of a number of her private letters, then, Baughan may in fact be considered to have played some part in relinquishing poetry herself. The most conclusive evidence to support this claim comes from the prolific correspondence she exchanged with various Vedantist teachers, both from the California Vedanta center she was later to visit, and from India. This material, and the discourse it represents, is further supplemented by Baughan's own notebook full of scribbled literary excerpts and

³⁰ Letter from Baughan to Miss Higgins, 11 August, 1909, MS 717/1, Wtu.

sayings. An insight into an intense and privileged personal dialogue, it suggests, too, that through seeking better things in a spiritual afterlife, she was by now thoroughly removed from temporal preoccupations like isolation.

In her doctoral thesis, Nancy Harris cites the impression that American transcendentalist writers like Emerson and Whitman left on Baughan's poetry, and the underlying influence of Platonism and German Idealism.³³ However, by the time she began to think about moving on from the poetic career that had dominated her first years in New Zealand, these first convictions had matured, enhanced by the mystical experiences, which 'sent me wandering in California in search of more knowledge...'³⁴ Considering the Platonic theory of reincarnation, which suggests that those who live virtuous lives will be rewarded, and the Kantian representations of transcendentalism which combine the inner and outer world in an absolute similar to that of the Vedantist concept of *Brahman*, it is hardly surprising that Baughan was later to embrace some aspects of Vedanta devotion. Thus, New England transcendentalism was only a beginning. In 1913 Baughan wrote: 'After long wandering on the mountain have I indeed found the trail, and a guide,'³⁵ and after a reconstruction of this same pilgrimage, it eventuates that she was not necessarily a 'failed poet,' but rather that, for different reasons, poetry had perhaps failed her. The following segment of this chapter offers a look at the basic tenets of Vedantist thought, in an attempt to better understand the appeal that this religion held for Baughan, while the third section contains a reading of the correspondence exchanged with the Californian Swamis. Drawing a clearer picture of her transition to eastern

³¹ Letter from Baughan to W.F Alexander, 20 March, 1937, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

³² Harris, p.110.

³³ Harris, p.54.

³⁴ Hall, 'B.E.B' excerpt, p.82.

religion, these letters access Baughan's spiritual dialogue, looking both at the questions that motivated her 'questing soul,' and the answers that would eventually provide a sense of resolution.

2. Reading Vedanta

Assuming that Vedanta philosophy may have played a part in Baughan's poetic cessation, one question becomes paramount. Despite her relative popularity, Baughan tells us in her letter to Alexander that she was a 'failed poet' - are there, then, Vedantist theories that helped convince her of this fact? What particular doctrines of this eastern religion appealed to her, perhaps even influencing her so strongly that she would abandon writing poetry altogether? Although most of the answers to these questions come from her exchange of private correspondence with a mentor named Swami Prajnananda, the letters themselves do not really clarify the underlying philosophy. To understand the references in these important letters properly, then, it is first necessary to consider some of the basic elements of Vedantist thought, along with the rudimentary concepts upon which the religion is based. It should be noted here that the following analysis is not intended as a complete introduction to Vedanta. Rather, it aims to try to render more accessible those theories upon which Baughan's own particular questions and arguments seem to have been based.

³⁵ Letter fragment, December 1913, MS 198, Wtu.

Vedanta is the culmination of the Indian philosophical wisdom that comes from the books of the Vedas. The Vedas are the four sacred Scriptures of the Hindus. Taken literally, the word Vedanta means the end of the Veda (*anta* = end), and represents a philosophy based on the teachings of the last section of the Vedas, called the Upanishads. The Upanishads consist of nearly one hundred texts, many of which are apocryphal. Comprised of dialogue, anecdote, parable and allegory, they are believed to have no beginning in time. In the introduction to his text *Vedanta for the Western World*, Christopher Isherwood notes that: 'Reduced to its elements, Vedanta Philosophy consists of three propositions. First, that Man's real nature is divine. Second, that the aim of human life is to realize this divine nature. Third, that all religions are essentially in agreement.'³⁶ He continues:

Vedanta asserts that the universe which is perceived by our senses is only an appearance...Vedanta goes on to assert that, beneath this appearance, this flux, there is an essential, unchanging Reality, which it calls Brahman, the Godhead...this Reality must be omnipresent. It must be within each one of us...When speaking of Brahman within the creature, Vedanta uses...another term, 'the Atman.'³⁷

Very loosely translated (as most texts seem to agree that a direct English interpretation is impossible) the term 'Atman' means the soul, or self, although in its root sense 'Atman means...breath or vital force.'³⁸ The Upanishads deal with the idea of the Atman in detail, asserting that true self-knowledge is to be attained through philosophical reflection, and in turn supported by a selfless performance of social

³⁶ Isherwood, p.1. Isherwood's text provides a gateway to western readers of Vedanta largely thanks to his very clear introduction. As an American student of Vedanta, he appears to have maintained a similar interest to that of Baughan, again through friendship with another Swami, named Prabhavananda. Published in 1948, his text is a collection of essays taken from the very small bi-monthly magazine entitled *Vedanta and the West*.

³⁷ Isherwood, pp.1-2.

duties. Most contemporary scholars seem to find the explanation of the term 'Brahman' more complex, one reason for this being the fact that the Godhead evidently exists as a concept both formed and formless, or in other words with qualities (*saguna*), and without qualities (*nirguna*). Incorporating his own readings from the Upanishads, K.P Bahadur attempts the following description, with assistance from the teachings of the Indian sage Shankara: 'Brahman is the eternal truth, he is the light of lights, he is the only source of the universe, he is pure being, consciousness and bliss, and he cannot be described in words. Shankara defines it as "the truth, the supreme and only one, and different from both relative truth and untruth."'”³⁹ The dominant purpose of Vedanta, then, is to increase individual self-knowledge; the entire object being the pursuit of the Godhead, or Brahman, in order to realize the intrinsic Godliness of the soul.

As part of this spiritual search, and like most Hindu philosophies, Vedanta also encompasses the concept of Karma, stating that each and every action and deed humans generate on earth will eventually be revisited on them through the process of reincarnation. As the *Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad* clearly states: 'A man becomes good by good deeds and bad by bad deeds.'⁴⁰ In other words, morally admirable and ethical deeds will allow one to reap rewards in the next life, whereas immoral and selfish acts will only cause the same individual future suffering. Thus, although Vedantist philosophy includes a belief in hell, it also offers a latent chance at redemption. Through the process of reincarnation, spirits may eventually return to the earth: '...the *Eesha Upanishad* says "Th[ose] persons, who are slayers of the self, go to demoniac worlds enveloped in blinding darkness."...[and] after suffering the

³⁸ William Beidler, *The Vision of Self in Early Vedanta*, p.44.

consequences of their deeds are reborn.’⁴¹ Karma works with a cumulative effect, so eventually one’s ensuing life represents the total sum of behaviour in all previous lives. Vedantist religion does not assume, however, that souls remain permanently in the transitional karmic phase. Ultimately, every person must finally realize the Atman within themselves, and be liberated from the process of reincarnation, becoming one with Brahman (the term for this Vedantist equivalent of the Christian mystic union is ‘*samadhi*’). In short, then, ‘Right action is the language of spiritual progress.’⁴²

There is, however, a major difficulty; an issue that comes in the form of the individual ego sense, called *ahankaara*. From Bahadur again: ‘Shankara says “So long as one is connected with the vile *ahankaara* there is not the least indication of *mukti* (emancipation)...The great *ahankaara*, even though apparently cut down to the roots, will, if excited only for a moment by the mind, come to life again and cause a hundred distractions, just as during the rain clouds are scattered about the storm.”’⁴³ Although Vedanta stresses the necessity of ‘right action,’ such action must constantly be undertaken with the intention of reducing the ego-sense, and not for personal gain or individual promotion. Unless the reason is pure, the deed effectively becomes invalid for spiritual advancement.

Why, then, does Vedanta demand such a complete erosion of individuality? The second main tenet that Isherwood suggests above, is that after first accepting that human nature is divine, we then need to learn to recognize this same nature. It is only by thus ceasing to believe that we are, or in other words, that we exist as individual entities, and by accepting that we are as one with all else in the universe, that the

³⁹ K.P.Bahadur, *The Wisdom of Vedaanta*, p.13.

⁴⁰ Bahadur, pp.262-263.

⁴¹ Bahadur, p.24.

⁴² Bahadur, p.13.

ultimate spiritual aim is ever achievable. An essentially monist philosophy, Vedanta demands that for the subject to become one with the Godhead, they must first realize the Atman, or the essential nature, allowing for recognition of one's total all-encompassing identity with the true, underlying Reality.⁴⁴ Since it is egotism, or the I-sense, that inevitably makes us discriminate between ourselves and others, this same sense of personal singularity must therefore be overcome. Isherwood recounts in detail the beneficial spiritual effects that will result from the suspension of *ahankaara*:

Judge every thought and every action from this standpoint: 'Does it make me freer, less egotistic more aware of the Reality; or does it attach me more tightly to the illusion of individual separateness?'...As soon as you start thinking and acting in [this] way, your life will be nothing but social service. You will be more available to your neighbours than ever before, because you will be less egotistic. You will do your duty to the community far better...You cannot dream how you will love [your neighbours] when you begin to see the Reality within each human being, and to understand his identity with yourself...By helping mankind, you are helping yourself. That's the law of all spiritual progress.⁴⁵

Only by voiding oneself of any and all egotistic desires is this spiritual progress thus made possible: 'All that has value for the ordinary person - wealth, sensual enjoyment, pleasures, power, esteem and the will to live in a world of tears and sorrows - is realised as valueless by the emancipated soul.'⁴⁶

This overview, brief though it is, gives a summary of some of the doctrines central to the Vedanta philosophy, and most importantly of those that relate directly to the correspondence and intense discourse that developed between Baughan and Swami Prajnananda to be discussed in the following section. However, what the principal

⁴³ Bahadur, p.8.

⁴⁴ Isherwood, p.3.

⁴⁵ Isherwood, p. 7.

letters also show is confirmation of what she writes in *Recorded Illuminates*: that by the time she became acquainted with Vedantist thought, Baughan was already largely out of patience with the Christian faith in which she had been raised.

3. Towards *Samadhi* - The Dissolution of the Ego-Sense

As noted, Baughan's first actual 'spiritual experience' came as early as 1905; and assessing what has already been discussed of Vedānta philosophy, with its central concept that humans exist as only a part of one complete and divine entity, it is hardly surprising that after these encounters she was drawn further towards Vedantist thought. Exactly how the initial epistolary connection with the Indian Swamis was established is somewhat unclear, although it appears from a letter fragment dated 1913 to have been prior to the trip to the California Vedanta centre in 1914. Unfortunately, Baughan does not appear to have kept any copies of her outgoing letters to these spiritual mentors, thus, as with much of her other correspondence, the archival holdings of this dialogue contain only the mail that was incoming from various Swamis and other religious guides. However, the majority of issues addressed by the Vedantist leaders make it quite clear that Baughan was primarily concerned with one essential issue: her personal pilgrimage towards spiritual redemption, and the search for salvation, or *samadhi*.

The tone of these letters demonstrates always a reciprocal dialogue, but though Baughan continually posed questions of her spiritual gurus, she seems not often to

⁴⁶ Bahadur, p.10.

have challenged the faith itself, but only her own ability to fulfil it. Although the most edifying letters in the context of this research are those from Swami Prajnananda, the general dialogue between Baughan and other Vedantist advocates is somewhat wider. The first catalogued letter, received from 1913 Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore,⁴⁷ discusses the path of realisation, talking to Baughan of ‘a way where a way is needed.’ It is, above all else, a message to a woman who was evidently feeling that her current passage through life was not helping her to attain the ultimate aim of *samadhi*: ‘...it is the right attitude of mind which I have ever held as important, whatever lessons I have learned and goal[s] I have reached have been through the intense interest I have taken from my childhood in nature and human relations.’⁴⁸ Nature and human relations, landscape and prisons: how significant it suddenly becomes that after the 1913 book of poems, Baughan’s next publication is a collection of prose studies on New Zealand scenery, while the rest of her seemingly endless energy is poured into the penal reform campaign centred in the Howard League.

In 1916, Swami Prajnananda sent a communication to Baughan which included a quote from her own previous letter. Because it gives us Baughan’s own words, it offers a more precise insight into the issues that she was concerned with:

Tell me that such and such an action will be good, will help others, will be acceptable to Ramakrishna or Christ or the Father and I will try to do it; but tell me that it will be acceptable to Beauty, or that it will make Beauty manifest,

⁴⁷ Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was the first non-westerner to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. A writer of poetry, novels and plays, his literary output was exceedingly prolific, and he was also a well-known painter.

⁴⁸ Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Baughan, 7 March, 1914, MS 198, Wtu.

...I will run to do it, with a song in my throat and tears of delight in my eyes. Do you see?⁴⁹

What this passage helps to clarify is Baughan's overriding passion for the idea of Beauty in all things, or, as her Swami preferred to put it, 'love in manifestation.' Her 1937 letter to Alexander,⁵⁰ with its reference to 'Beauty,' makes this statement even more significant, for it appears that Baughan was beginning to see that her own path to salvation lay in manifesting beauty both in thought and deed. At the same time, however, she felt that her own life, as it then stood, was not focused on accomplishing this spiritual objective. Along with Tagore's letter, such comments also help to make better sense of her shift to a period of nature writing, since 'Nature manifests Beauty simply because all nature is essentially spiritual,'⁵¹ an adage that is continually confirmed by the majority of her Indian correspondents. Baughan had always tended to call herself a 'nature-mystic' ('Nature has always been my angel. I suppose I was a 'nature-mystic' without knowing it, though agnostic in many respects'⁵²), while other scenic writings confirm her awareness of human transience: 'Human relics in deep bush - do they emphasise more Man's changefulness, or Nature's slow procedure? Perhaps they draw a line between both.'⁵³

The predominant question, though, is whether Baughan's earlier career as a poet, which she decided to forego, would have been considered as valid action, or as inducing the correct karmic patterns, for spiritual advancement under Vedanta philosophy. Prajnananda initially writes to Baughan along similar lines to Tagore, 'The goal of religion is easy of access for the developed art-consciousness,' but then

⁴⁹ Letter from Swami Prajnananda to Baughan, 26 November, 1916, MS 198, Wtu.

⁵⁰ See page 69.

⁵¹ Letter from Swami Prajnananda to Baughan, 26 November, 1916, MS 198, Wtu.

⁵² Hall, 'B.E.B' excerpt, p.15.

adds the following caution: 'But if you long to manifest Beauty in everything you think or do, you must have an unfailing fund of love in your heart...*the mere artist has Beauty only dripping, as it were, through his pen or pencil, it does not necessarily pervade all his thoughts and deeds.* The real point of religious life is to have Beauty manifested through everything one thinks or does...' ⁵⁴ The concept of the 'mere artist,' first put to Baughan by her personal spiritual mentors, is an idea that she came to adopt whole-heartedly and conscientiously. Quite obviously, it is also a concept completely at odds with the idealised portrayal of the artist favoured by the cultural nationalists. Taken in correlation with her other conversations, it is a belief that seems to have become at least partly responsible for the actions and decisions that followed, not least of which was the resolution to discontinue writing and publishing poetry.

Prajanananda's comment, while allowing that 'art-consciousness' may aid recognition of the Atman, also provokes some doubt as to the moral worth of the artistic process. Likewise, the concept of the artist already discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis seems to focus on the self, with implications of egotism and self-inflation. So how does this ethical question relate to Baughan, and the ongoing struggle mentioned in that early and vital comment to Miss Higgins regarding the 'moral purpose' of poetry? It seems likely to have been the aspects of egotism and individuality involved in writing verse, as opposed to those of public service necessary for *samadhi*, that caused her the most difficulty. In *Two New Zealand Roses*, again notable for its autobiographical slant, Baughan not only replicates her

⁵³ 'Forest and Ice,' *Studies in New Zealand Scenery*, p.254.

⁵⁴ Letter from Swami Prajanananda to Baughan, 26 November, 1916, MS 198, Wtu (my emphasis).

visionary experience,⁵⁵ but also introduces the factors that dominated her private correspondence with the Swamis. Initially preoccupied with her own perception of her position and behaviour in life, Rosy begins to see her own failed marriage as a representation of individual selfishness. Yet this kind of indulgent reflection on individual 'sins and shortcomings' eventually amounts only to a further inflation of the ego. When it becomes clear to her that this is precisely what is to be avoided, the newly enlightened Rosy suddenly cries out: "Too much ME there, that's it! That's what finding the Whole, even for just one glimpse, does so release one from! It's not enough to be unselfish, one can be that and still be frightfully self-centred. Self-less that's what we need to become."⁵⁶ But it is not until the dissolution of Rosy's marriage and Rosamund's return to New Zealand, that the two begin to understand that the ego-sense so reviled by Vedanta is the very entity which has previously prevented their spiritual peace and progression: "Yes, that's it...To give up completely, in every way, at every minute, Pomponious Ego, Esq. And Dear old Dirty Me, and every blessed possession and right they have, to GOD!"⁵⁷ With this attitude so clear in her manuscript, it helps explain both Baughan's letters, and also some of the reasons behind the often harsh condemnation of her own poetry.

Despite her earlier work in England,⁵⁸ it has already been noted that Baughan was closeted by herself when she was writing at Chorlton, and presumably had little thought of social work other than to produce poetry for the public. Rabindranath

⁵⁵ Baughan writes in *Two New Zealand Roses*: "All whiter than snow it was, and ALL LOVE, in and out and over and under and all over...And rapture, O rapture!... Was it a vision such as I've read about and always thoroughly disbelieved in? But I didn't see Christ or saints or angels or anyone, and it didn't seem very unreal, either - On the contrary! It's the very realist, real experience I've ever had!" p.282.

⁵⁶ *TNZR*, p.311.

⁵⁷ *TNZR*, p.316.

⁵⁸ Baughan worked as a social worker in the London slums before coming to live in New Zealand.

Tagore advises Baughan on the inherent dangers of self-gratification ('The life of self-gratification proves apathy and sluggishness in our nature just as the river choked with weeds proves the feebleness of the current'⁵⁹) and it is also clear from Swami Prajnananda's 1916 letter that the question of egotism had previously been discussed, with regard to the concept of Indian nationalism. Well-renowned not only as a literary figure, but also as a Bengali nationalist, there is no record of such a discussion taking place with Tagore, but Baughan, concerned with the growth of the ego-sense implicit in political nationalist identity, had obviously questioned Prajnananda on his involvement in the drive for a single nation. He replies to her: 'When nationalism is political, it certainly becomes egotistic...but when nationalism is spiritual, the collective pursuit of man's higher altruistic duties becomes the foundation...Indian nationalism means a collective scheme of life for the practice, preservation and preaching of her spirituality.'⁶⁰ The word 'collective' is clearly important in this context, refuting as it does the idea of any individual ego development from political machinations, and stressing instead the unifying spiritual nature of nationhood. Prajnananda continues: 'India as a nation means a Temple Universal of the Spiritual Ideal which the whole world is interested in building up and preserving...So where is the egotism you complain of?'⁶¹

It seems that Prajnananda's answers were enough to convince Baughan of the validity both of Vedanta, and of her personal spiritual search, for *Two New Zealand Roses* highlights further the positive representations of the religion in her life. Employed as a nurse while overseas during the war, Rosamund mentions one of her patients to Rosy: "I nursed an old Indian once, Hindu...who had a lot of ideas that he

⁵⁹ Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Baughan, 7 March, 1914, MS 198, Wtu.

took for Gospel...One was, that evolution applies to souls, as well as bodies, and that it takes so much living to evolve us, even a little, that one life here on earth isn't enough..."⁶² Obviously more well-versed in the terminology of Vedanta, Rosy identifies the concept of reincarnation with alacrity, acknowledging time on earth as something of a classroom to which people constantly return: "...then home we go to Heaven for a holiday, till it's time to come back, and learn a bit more."⁶³ Baughan also identifies her early desire to find a gender-neutral concept of God: "How I wish we had a super-personal pronoun! I don't feel quite at home with the idea of God as a 'He' you know!"⁶⁴ The paradigm of a God that can accommodate both sexes is possible within Vedanta, simply by virtue of the 'formed' or 'form-less' ideology that supports the concept of Brahman. At the tail-end of a letter to Baughan, one of the Swamis advises her on the gender neutrality of Vedanta: 'May the Divine Mother (call or take as you like as long as you understand the Essence) fulfil your heart's desire in every way...' ⁶⁵ The Godhead, perceived as an omnipresent reality extant within each of us, is, as such, a 'sexless' entity, not curtailed by the gender constructs so dominant in the Christian trinity.

Another issue which Baughan brings up in her novel, and then addresses positively through Vedanta, is the parochial nature of many Western religions. Trying to explain how irritating she finds this exclusivity, Rosy bemoans the inability of the Christian Church to accept alternative forms of devotion, and states: "Ramakrishna used to say that God-in-form was every bit as valid and ideal for those built that

⁶⁰ Letter from Swami Prajnananda to Baughan, 26 November, 1916, MS 198, Wtu.

⁶¹ Letter from Swami Prajnananda to Baughan, 26 November, 1916, MS 198, Wtu.

⁶² *TNZR*, p.297.

⁶³ *TNZR*, p.297.

⁶⁴ *TNZR*, p.308.

⁶⁵ Letter from unnamed Swami to Baughan, 8 June, 1917, MS 198, Wtu.

way...as God-formless...and the real essential is, just to be devoted, heart and soul, to whichever is yours, but to let others freely have theirs too.”⁶⁶ She continues: “If the Church knows our Reality, I wish she’d teach it. And O, I do wish she wouldn’t be so exclusive!...There’s ever so much that other religions could teach the Christian Church.”⁶⁷ One of these major differences, and something that Baughan adopted, was the yoga training she was involved in to aid her ability to focus on the inner being - a letter from another Swami in California urges her to ‘increase your breathing into double ie inhale 8 hold 32 exhale 16. This would help the concentration better.’⁶⁸

In the 1916 letter, Prajnananda wrote again to Baughan, of Beauty:

Did you ever, while listening to some wonderful music, feel the forms of sound or harmony slipping out of your mind and the beauty of it becoming so intense that the art vanishes leaving your mind lost in some unspeakable joy? . . . an artistic thrill that buoys up your soul is called a *rasa*. . . When nature’s beauties appeal to you, know for certain that Love outside is appealing to Love inside. If you can bring out this love that is in you, you necessarily bring out Beauty to pervade all your thoughts and deeds.⁶⁹

That Baughan accepted this much is clear from other correspondence. Through her knowledge of Vedantic principles she was able to draw a connection between art and a higher spiritual experience, the same one of which she would later write to Bethell. However, although she recognised an intimate relationship between art and Beauty, it seems that Baughan felt herself unable to ‘bring out’ the love inside solely through the process of writing poetry, and by the time she wrote the 1936 letter to Bethell, she had

⁶⁶ *TNZR*, p.324.

⁶⁷ *TNZR*, pp.323-4.

⁶⁸ Letter from unnamed Swami to Baughan, 8 June, 1917, MS 198, Wtu.

⁶⁹ Letter from Prajnananda to Baughan, 26 November, 1916, MS 198, Wtu.

not attempted to put together a book of verse since 1913.⁷⁰ In August 1917, Baughan received a further letter from Prajnananda, crucial in that it suggests that she had written to him with information concerning her ‘deserting muse,’ or, in other words, her resolution to stop writing verse. He writes:

Yes, poetry is...the law of your individualised being, only you have given up writing it in order better to live it...From poetry the form, your soul is seeking to lose itself in poetry the substance. Rather than giving up poetry you are really going to give yourself up to it. *So I would rather take it all not in terms of a greater renunciation but in those of a greater self-surrender.* The poet’s fame is a tinsel compared with the eventual self-surrender, and if poetry does not lead on to it, poetry is rather a bondage, a prostitution. The sooner the very substance of poetry possesses the poet beyond any manoeuvring to play with the rhyme, the more fortunate indeed is he or she.⁷¹

What this passage shows categorically, is that regardless of the reason, at some point Baughan made a conscious decision to renounce poetry. It seems, too, that poetry was not providing the ‘self-surrender’ Prajnananda mentions here, nor the ‘artistic thrill’ that he had talked of in his letter the year before. It suggests that poetry had become a project stimulating material and mortal gain, and, as such, could indeed be regarded as a spiritual prostitution. Whether exacerbated by illness or not, then, Baughan’s abandoning of poetry does seem at least partly attributable to the growing place of the Vedanta dialogue in her life. She herself appears to have induced Prajnananda’s use of the term ‘renunciation,’ indicating abandonment, rejection, a discontinuation, based on her compelling desire for personal salvation, and a need both to avoid stimulation of the deadly ego-sense, and to initiate positive karmic

⁷⁰ This was the book *Poems From the Port Hills*, eventually published in 1923.

responses. Ultimately unwilling to give up that 'eventual self-surrender' in return for earthly and comparatively short-lived repute, she began instead to initiate the altruistic conversation of penal reform that was to occupy her for the rest of her life.

When Baughan is read solely as 'poet,' her story finishes here, crippled by this renunciation. However, as Prajnananda indicates ('I almost feel how Beauty is calling on to your soul every moment of your life. May it make you its own in every thought and word and deed!'⁷²) a reading that acknowledges her other conversations, including this one with Vedanta, provides for a different interpretation. It is not certain how familiar Baughan was with the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore during her period of correspondence with him, but the following excerpt, from the beginning of his poem entitled 'Little of Me' seems to replicate exactly the decisions that she was to make:

Let only that little be left of me
whereby I may name thee my all.
Let only that little be left of my will
whereby I may feel thee on every side,
and come to thee in everything
and offer to thee my love every moment.

This, in effect, is what Baughan achieved in her dialogue with Vedanta: the subordination of her own will through the devotion to a higher being, and the surrender of her individual desires to selfless humanitarian concerns through the privileging of divergent conversations. Baughan had named her 'Father-Mother God'⁷³ as her 'all,' and the best means she could find of offering 'love every moment,' and of bringing out the 'love inside her,' was to dedicate her existence to penal

⁷¹ Letter from Swami Prajnananda, 6 August, 1917, MS 198, Wtu (my emphasis).

⁷² Letter from Swami Prajnananda, 6 August, 1917, MS 198, Wtu.

⁷³ Berta Burns notes: 'She told me she greatly preferred the Hindu conception of a Father-Mother God. It represented a more complete attitude to life, a totality of perception that some dogmas have ignored.' Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

reform. Once again, a comment from her letter to W.F. Alexander comes to mind, highlighting her complex network of priorities, and summing up in the most reliable words of all, her feelings on the abandoned poetic effort. In support of all that Burns tells us in her memoirs, Baughan writes: 'It didn't, mercifully, deprive her of the love of Beauty, though, or of the perception that the unseen Beauty can, and should, rule all our destinies, and can be served in all sorts of ways...that conviction is responsible for her transactions with prisoners, and for the idea of putting their difficulties and our neglect on record, in "P in P."'

CHAPTER IV

THE PENAL REFORM COLLOQUY

1. Beauty from Ashes

As has been seen, Baughan was adamant that her prison reform work should not be viewed as 'sacrificial,' and after the shift away from poetry it seems that she made a conscious decision to privilege such work that she felt would well serve 'the unseen Beauty.'¹ In 1937 she wrote to Johannes Andersen declaring: "I regard social service as an art you know: and my contribution to society is still to try and educe Beauty from Ashes..."² This statement seems to sum up her dedicated attitude to her humanitarian aims and work, and as Harris notes in her thesis, is also recognisable in Baughan's approach to poetry: 'The 'Beauty from Ashes' metaphor - with many variants - suffuses her work. It has obvious application to the rejuvenation of the arts from a period of stagnation and disintegration.'³ It is the application of this maxim, too, that helps to reveal some of the inner spiritual motivation behind Baughan's interest in penal reform, and to account for the strength that drove her untiring efforts to improve the conditions of prison life and to instigate discussion and parliamentary reform on issues of considerable social and moral importance. As her letters and other writings suggest ('O dear me, if earth were only peopled by humanity and not by nature too, what would such as me do!'⁴) Baughan was enraptured with the visual beauty of the natural world around her. In her policy of 'educ[ing] Beauty from

¹ Letter from Baughan to W.F. Alexander, 20 March 1937, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

² Letter from Baughan to Johannes Andersen, 1937, MS 148/37, Wtu.

³ Harris, p.58.

Ashes,' and as a part of this way of seeing, she also embraced a perspective which acknowledged an inner beauty extant within the prisoner. Her compassion extended further than just the petty criminal, encompassing those convicted of felonies like homicide: thus, it is notable that Harris suggests when discussing Baughan's poetry, 'her recurring motif [was] of the creation of something whole, or good, from something incomplete or evil...' ⁵ The same ambition was later to become the mainstay of Baughan's humanitarian concerns.

There can be little doubt that Baughan's continuing spiritual involvement was largely responsible for her returning to the arena of social work, for, as has been established, Vedanta thought asserts both that beauty is to be found within all things, and that 'Right action is the language of spiritual progress.' ⁶ Baughan herself makes the connection in her correspondence, firstly in the 1937 letter to Alexander which scorns his automatic privileging of the poetic discourse over the altruistic, and secondly, in a letter written ten years later to Lincoln Efford: ' "give all that you may gain all," does seem to be the law of the spiritual life - though we must not of course "give in order to gain!" ...Yes our limitations are our curse! But under them is the sustaining spirit which does sustain.' ⁷ Investigating evidence which reveals the intensity of her work with prisoners, it becomes increasingly clear that Baughan did 'give all' to penal reform in New Zealand, in the areas of emotional, political and financial support. Whether working inside the prisons, writing long and frequent letters of support to the families of those who had been incarcerated, or lobbying for the abolition of capital and corporal punishment, her 'right action' was continual. She

⁴ Letter from Baughan to Bethell, 2 Nov, no year, MS 38, MBL. See also reference Ch. 2, p.50.

⁵ Harris, p.97.

⁶ Isherwood, p.13.

⁷ Letter from Baughan to Lincoln Efford, 21 April, 1947, MS 445, Wtu.

was opposed to long and brutalising periods in prison, and also believed, somewhat ahead of her time, that offenders should be given behavioural therapy which would in turn help reintegrate them into society. In addition, and presumably again through the progression of her own inner spiritual development, Baughan realised that the key to rehabilitating prisoners lay not simply with the elimination of physical brutality, but also in the care of their psychological welfare. One of her main areas of concern was caring for the mental health of offenders; as she noted to Lincoln Efford late in 1952: 'A man in prison once said to me in despair "They don't treat your body so badly nowadays, but they kill your mind in these places.'"⁸

Baughan herself highlights the interplay of multiple voices dominant in this part of her life, stating that the Howard League in New Zealand 'really began in a conversation.'⁹ Her early participation in a matrix of networked dialogues, then, was to culminate in this ultimate expression of colloquy: penal reform work. The conversations contributing to this colloquy are manifold, including two major reciprocal correspondences with League members Frederick Archibald de la Mare (1877-1960) and Lincoln Efford (1908-1962), contact with incarcerated prisoners and those on probation, support for the families of individuals in jail, as well as various interchanges with politicians and numerous letters to the papers. The intention of my final chapter is to explore some of the conversations that were a part of this reform process. Once again much of the textual focus is on the major channels of correspondence, firstly with de la Mare (a lawyer involved in the early push for reforms) and secondly with Efford (who was involved with the League throughout his life). In the case of de la Mare, the analysis also takes into account various excerpted

⁸ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 10 December, 1952, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

material from *People in Prison*, the small text which he co-authored and published with Baughan in 1936.¹⁰ As a part of her penal rehabilitation work, Baughan inverted the usual prison hierarchy by giving prisoners a voice, through her text, with which to speak. Thus, they too become part of her colloquy, and a factor in the humanitarian narrative, while an exploration of the dialogues in which she took part reveals social concern as the privileged discourse of Baughan's latter life.

Berta Burns notes in her memoirs that Baughan first 'became interested in penal reform work when two runaway girls from Burwood Home called and spun her a tale...I met her in 1919 and ideas were even then revolving in her fertile brain as to how best to counter the stupidity of our then penal system.'¹¹ She also divulges that it was Baughan's interest in the English based Howard League for Penal Reform that first encouraged her to try to open a branch in New Zealand, in Christchurch in 1924. Her primary areas of concern during this early period are reported as follows: firstly, a wider use of probation and preliminary reports before sentence by magistrates, secondly, classification of prisoners, thirdly, trained staff within the prisons, fourthly, the abolition of capital punishment, and lastly, proper training for release.¹² Although most of these demands do not appear overly radical from a contemporary viewpoint, Burns is quick to point out that, for her time, Baughan was far ahead of her peers, many of whom considered repeat offenders to be 'less than human': 'At that time, 1924, these were considered very revolutionary ideas and opposition was very robust.

⁹ Baughan's Retrospective, New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform Archives, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

¹⁰ A letter from Baughan to de la Mare in April 1936 confirms him as her 'co-author,' while Berta Burns writes the following: 'During the years 1930 to 1940, she and F.A. de la Mare compiled and she published... "People in Prison"...'.

¹¹ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

¹² Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

But so was she!’¹³ In addition, it is clear that Baughan’s persistent efforts established one of the most solidly based league branches in the world: ‘...branches and affiliations in various parts of the Dominions came and went, flourished and died...Of these probably only the Canadian Prisoners’ Welfare Association and the New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform represent continuing and stable associations...’¹⁴

It is difficult to comprehend the dialogues and particular areas of debate surrounding Baughan’s social colloquy without some reference to these revolutionary ideas, and to some of the League’s aims. In 1948, at the age of seventy-eight, Baughan delivered a retrospective, discussing the early work and preoccupations of the New Zealand Howard League. The following material is excerpted from her original hand-written document, held in the archives of the Howard League:

The New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform: A
Retrospect by B.E. Baughan

The New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform really began in a conversation between three people, in Christchurch, and in the year 1924. We had all three had first-hand experience of the workings of our present penal system, and were much troubled by some of them; and one of us had learned, from a letter in the London ‘Spectator’, of the existence of the Howard League in England, and of its preoccupations with the same problems - had in fact become a member of it and been sent some information....A few personal friends joined us, and we gradually made way, though it cannot be said we were popular, and in fact we met, at first, with some scorn and, of course, with the charge of ‘sentimentality.’...We were often invited by those in high places, notably by members of the Prisons Board, to change ourselves into an After-care society, which, we were politely assured, was far more necessary. But, luckily, we had been warned by our parent body against any such defection (sic)

¹³ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

¹⁴ Gordon Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, p.307.

from our proper aims...we had long been troubled at the readiness with which our own courts 'put away' sometimes very mild offenders...We pressed also, from time to time, for the appointment of women police, and for the abolition of flogging and capital punishment, both objects now attained. But our best, and our continuing, work has, I think always been the gradual education of the New Zealand public and is it too much to hope that this will, before long, result in the overhauling of our whole penal system?¹⁵

It is apparent from her biographical details that Baughan chose not to rely on the judgements of others to draw her conclusions, and, in fact, that she became acquainted with penal conditions through first-hand experience. After her death in 1958, Lincoln Efford wrote to her friend Berta Burns, inquiring as to the full extent of Baughan's personal involvement in prison work: 'I know she was a visitor at Addington, and I see you mentioned that she had served on the staff of Point Halswell...She told me about visiting at Paparua Prison...'¹⁶ Burns elaborates in the Turnbull papers: 'To further her insight, she managed to get a job for a period on the staff of Point Halswell Women's Prison, where she could talk and study offenders...Always, to her, they were unhappy people who had lost their social bearings...'¹⁷

It was her attempts to help these 'unhappy people' that initiated for Baughan the beginnings of new and significant avenues of correspondence, but the colloquy that was instigated by her involvement in penal reform involved a new group of speakers from those of previous dialogues. One of the participants was her friend Berta Burns, who aided the League's cause whenever she could, through a rather providential involvement in Wellington politics. Yet Baughan comments on another change, when she notes somewhat dryly in a letter that 'Women I've generally found supply the

¹⁵ New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform Archives, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

¹⁶ Letter from Lincoln Efford to Berta Burns, 5 November, 1958, MS 132, 5/1.

¹⁷ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

moral energy, men the practical knowledge...'¹⁸ (It should be mentioned here that in making such a comment Baughan was underestimating her own acumen, for her continual financial contributions to penal reform demonstrate that she was well aware of the need for practical, as well as emotional, assistance.) Although she continued in correspondence with Bethell, Burns and other women throughout her life, the two most prominent players in her new work, during and after the establishment of the New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform, were men. Both de la Mare and Efford were in regular correspondence with Baughan from the period 1924 until her death in 1958, and, due to the fact that the discussion is often related to the work of the League, many of their letters have survived. Held in archives at the Turnbull and Macmillan Brown Libraries, these extra avenues of correspondence are integral to this thesis not just for the historical information they provide about Baughan's colloquy, but also for what they tell us about her personal attitudes and perspective on the integrated discourse of penal reform.

2. Creating Controversy - *People in Prison* and Baughan's Indictment of the Penal System

The intention behind the release of Baughan's anonymously published small text, *People in Prison*, is made clear in a letter to her co-author, Frederick de la Mare. She writes: '...Re "P in P" the only subtitles I can think of are: "An Indictment of the Prison System" or "And what happens to them." I prefer the first - more provocative!

¹⁸ Letter from Baughan to Lincoln Efford, 17 April, 1947, MS 445, Wtu.

Discussion is what we're after!'¹⁹ A reading of this progressive book makes it obvious, too, that despite the fact that the eventual edition seems to have foregone the subtitle, the intended indictment of New Zealand's penal system remained. Baughan acknowledged from the outset that the material was designed to stimulate debate on contentious issues, and that it aimed to answer, in the negative, those specific issues and questions that the reader might formulate from a reading of case studies included in the text: "But do Dominion prisons make *any* attempt to reform? What remedial agencies besides preaching, do they *say* that they employ? What are their curative methods, and who applies them?" ...there is one thing particularly significant about any "remedial agencies"...no prisoner knows anything about them, and the prison officials are silent on the matter.'²⁰ Well aware of the controversial effect that some of her comments would produce among prison officials, Baughan writes in the same letter to de la Mare: 'I suppose we're safe from any action for libel? I leave you to see to this!'²¹ Born in Christchurch in 1877, de la Mare was editor of the student magazine 'The Spike' in 1903-4, and became president of the Victoria Students' Association in 1907. He later worked as a barrister and solicitor in Hamilton, and in addition to his position as Chairman of the Hamilton branch of the Howard League, he was for a time also chairman of the League of Nations Union. De la Mare's involvement in the Howard League dated back to its New Zealand inception, and Baughan's specific collaboration with him was a very sensible one, for as she acknowledges above, in his occupation as lawyer, de la Mare brought a great deal of

¹⁹ Letter from Baughan to Frederick Alexander de la Mare, 20 August, 1936, MS 0144-4, Wtu. It should be noted here that these letters are generally rather loosely addressed to 'Neff'. However, Burns tells us that de la Mare co-wrote this text, and Baughan addresses 'Neff' as the co-author, so it can safely be assumed that they are one and the same.

²⁰ *People in Prison*, p.160.

²¹ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 20 August, 1936, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

‘practical knowledge’ to the publication of the text. And, although both chose to remain anonymous, it is clear that Baughan (writing under the pseudonym T.I.S.²²) felt she owed a great deal to the input and assistance that he had provided: ‘...my hearty thanks...especially to that friend whose “revision” has practically resulted in the re-writing about half of it.’²³

The dominant influence of Baughan’s guiding conviction regarding her ‘Beauty from Ashes’ theory, is evidenced by two of the opening epigraphs from *People in Prison*: one, a quote from ‘Clara’ states that ‘There’s some good in the best of folk,’ whilst another reads ‘Even in a rotten apple the pips is good.’ These words epitomise her guiding belief, and support the conclusions that Baughan^{was} able to draw as a result of her personal prison work experience. Despite her deliberate anonymity, she is certain from the outset about her authority to speak confidently in this dialogue, noting that: ‘...it has transpired that prisons and ex-prisoners have occupied practically the whole of my time for the last ten years.’²⁴ From these experiences is derived the central idea which supports her suggestions for reform and additional probationary measures; that is, that prisoners can and should be segregated into two groups, those who can again become useful members of society (‘[who] can develop past their several stages of delinquency, and “grow themselves up,” into good citizens’²⁵) and those who cannot. In an earlier article in *The Mirror*, Baughan had elaborated on this opinion, stating that segregation, in a non-penal institution, ‘could

²² Taken from the Greek word of the same spelling, ‘TIS’ can mean either ‘Who’ in the interrogative, or ‘Someone anyone.’ It is gender neutral, and presumably Baughan chose this pseudonym to emphasise both her own anonymity as author, and the anonymity of ‘Dominia’ (the name she gives to New Zealand in the text).

²³ *People in Prison*, p.3.

²⁴ *People in Prison*, p.1.

²⁵ *People in Prison*, p.2.

be the only humane, the only effective way of dealing with the mental defective.²⁶ The case studies which make up the central body of *People in Prison* include offenders from both groups.

It is in the concluding section of this text that Baughan makes her boldest claims, and brings forward the indictment which ensures 'discussion.' She is open in her condemnation of untrained wardens ('...as you might expect - physically quite good; mentally, only so-so, but certainly for reformatory purposes, untrained...'²⁷), an issue which she continued to push in following years, as a later letter to Efford demonstrates: 'I think, by the way, that we need trained social workers as well as scientific? Our average lawbreaker in New Zealand does need to have everything "humanised" before he can take it in.'²⁸ In recognition of this, she suggests what is needed: 'Insight and understanding...the trained social servant...a certain imaginative sympathy...'²⁹ In addition, Baughan uses the conclusion to make perhaps her most controversial claim, that 'Punishment does not deter the great mass of our fellow-citizens from committing crimes.'³⁰ She suggests that penal incarceration, because it fails to acknowledge any sense of the 'individual' offender, cannot, therefore, truly attempt to reform; she encourages instead the development of proper 'Moral Hospitals,' and probation: '...not...mere Police supervision...the real, friendly but firm, supervision in the community that it ought to be.'³¹ With these proposals in mind, then, it is hardly surprising that Baughan found severe fault with the country's existing penal institutions: '*Dominia*...is a good place for the study of prisoners

²⁶ 'A Champion of the Feeble Minded,' *The Mirror*, 1 August, 1926.

²⁷ *People in Prison*, p.161.

²⁸ Letter from Baughan to Lincoln Efford, 1 March, 1946, MS 445, Wtu.

²⁹ *People in Prison*, p.166.

³⁰ *People in Prison*, p.163.

³¹ *People in Prison*, p.170.

because she has, in proportion to population, an undue share of them. Moreover, she really believes in imprisonment...physically, her prisons are clean and decent. Yet they fail lamentably as deterrent and reformatory agencies. Why?'³² Nor is it surprising that the book, on its release, encountered a certain amount of hostility.

In order to stimulate the ensuing debate, one field of distribution considered particularly necessary was, of course, the political arena. Baughan's frustration with the sentencing policies of New Zealand courts is often in evidence ('...English Prisons report just in shows only 747 [people] sent to Borstal in [19]34 - we sent over 150 last year!...What are our Courts doing?'³³), and she clearly felt that for *People in Prison* to have its intended impact, the case studies and conclusions she had drawn needed to be recognised outside of prison officialdom, by those involved in actual decision making. To this end, she posed the following questions to de la Mare: 'We should send at once don't you think? To all members of Cabinet? All judges? And all Magistrates?'³⁴ That she achieved this aim is apparent: a letter to de la Mare, on behalf of the Chief Justice, shows that the book had already been sent to those offices seen as having the most influence, and gives an accurate representation of the less than favourable prejudice it had activated: 'The Chief Justice has directed me to write to you and acknowledge the receipt of the book *People in Prison*...he will take the earliest opportunity of reading the book, which he will certainly do sympathetically, even if it should turn out upon his reading it that he may not be altogether in agreement with your own views and inferences...'³⁵ Baughan's indictment had indeed provoked those in power; as de la Mare wrote later in the same year: '...the

³² *People in Prison*, p.3.

³³ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 3 September, 1936, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

³⁴ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 3 September, 1936, MS 5751-14, Wtu.

³⁵ Letter from the Chief Justice's Chambers, 4 March, 1937, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

best advertisement this book has had is the enormous hostility from the Prisons Department. You could not get a better testimonial...'³⁶

The writing and distribution of this publication, Burns reports, took up a great deal of Baughan's time - roughly ten years from start to finish - and the correspondence between Baughan and de la Mare makes it very clear that it was a project dedicated to public education and interest, and not to financial gain. It is also apparent that Baughan considered the timing of distribution to be crucial. Before the actual release, and in a letter headed 'Strictly Confidential,' she wrote optimistically to de la Mare: '...all profits to go to Howard League, if you, as co-author, agree? Now, can you find a publisher (not Whitcombe's!) and let us get this thing out while Labour is in power?'³⁷ Presumably Baughan felt that Savage's 1935 reformist Labour government was the one most likely to be sympathetic to their cause, and, perhaps not surprisingly, publishers Whitcombe and Tombs were still well out of favour. In a previous letter she is even more adamant about finding an alternative company: '....But not Whitcombe and Tombs, I beg! Recently, I discovered that they don't bother to make their royalty accounts tally with the facts!!...nor did they seem at all ashamed when they had to confess it - So we don't play speaks any more than I can help. The business side of publishing is even more disgusting than most business sides, even!!'³⁸ Eventually, the book was published at her own expense³⁹ by Unicorn Press in Auckland. The financial cost to Baughan seems to have been quite considerable, yet she appears still to have been largely unconcerned: 'I was hoping to pay a bit off a (small) mortgage next March, but it can wait... you see, the way I look

³⁶ Letter from de la Mare to Edward Dowsett, 28 September, 1937, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

³⁷ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, April, 1936, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

³⁸ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 12 March, 1935, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

³⁹ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

at it, I couldn't possibly buy anything better than a little public enlightenment on our topic...' ⁴⁰

Such public enlightenment was a key motif for Baughan throughout the exchange of correspondence with de la Mare, and it was an aim which helped fuel the lengthy drive to release her book. In 1935 she had written to him: '...We must educate our country, for nobody else will on these matters. The reversion to flogging shows just what our judges are...' ⁴¹ Baughan also realised the ability of public opinion, ranged on the side of the League, to force referenda, and to get the resulting Bill submissions in front of parliament. Yet her actions seem never solely politically oriented, and her exchange of letters with the families of incarcerated offenders stands as a reliable testament to her concern for human welfare, and specifically, for the individual. An interview in 1922 proves that two years before the official commencement of the Howard League in New Zealand, Baughan was already involved in this work: "The chief part of my work is character-building, by means of correspondence...I find this so absorbingly interesting and encouraging, that I wish more women of years, experience, leisure, education and sympathy would take it up. I am convinced that the large majority of our delinquents are really immature morally - *not degenerate*.'" At the conclusion of *People in Prison* Baughan writes, too: 'Each and every individual member of the community bears...some responsibility to every other. In some sort, in some degree, all men and women ARE the "keepers" of their brothers and sisters...' ⁴² Throughout her entire involvement with *People in Prison*, then, her attitude remains the same - financially selfless, and concerned always with the education of the public: 'The book was a gift to the public, and a gift it stays, there being at the moment no

⁴⁰ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 2 June, 1937, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

profit at all, when postage is counted in. We can thus boast of really deserving the Rotary boast - Service, NO profit. Except to the public of course...'⁴³

If Baughan had ever been hoping to reclaim any of her personal expenditure through public sales of *People in Prison*, she was to be disappointed. In endeavouring to make the books available to as wide an audience as possible, a number of copies were sent, again with Baughan taking on board the postage costs, to various bookshops and stationers around the country. Unfortunately, judging by the amount that were later returned with apologetic notes attached, the public were less than enthusiastic, and most were left untouched on the shelves. Corrigan's Booksellers in New Plymouth were 'unable to sell them,' an unnamed bookshop in Nelson stated that they were '... returning the 2 copies...regret to say there is no sale for them..,' whilst Coulls Somerville Wilkie Ltd, a Manufacturing Stationers in Dunedin returned their allocated books with the following comments: 'We regret to advise that we have been unsuccessful in disposing of any of these [3] copies...'⁴⁴ However, with her customary optimism, Baughan seems not to have been particularly distressed, and writes to de la Mare advocating an alternative option: 'We never expected to sell many, did we? But we can afford to give all away!! and I suggest now supplying all the Libraries, free??...so you see we'll not have to have a bonfire...'⁴⁵ Exactly how much money she spent on the whole project is unclear, but her total financial contribution to penal reform (much of it resulting largely from her growing association with Lincoln Efford) must have been substantial. Her donations seem always in evidence, and a letter in December, 1948, demonstrates again her continuing

⁴¹ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 12 March, 1935, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

⁴² *People in Prison*, p.172.

⁴³ Letter fragment from Baughan to de la Mare, 5 October, 1937, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

⁴⁴ These letters held in MS 0144-4, Wtu, undated.

and very practical awareness of the necessity of monetary expenditure to achieve her aims: 'Enclosed please find one pound to help with the Xmas for the prison camps up north which I do hope our branch is furnishing as usual...'⁴⁶

Little personal information is available on Lincoln Efford,⁴⁷ but his exchange of letters with Baughan constitutes the second major reciprocal correspondence of her humanitarian colloquy. It is known that he was both a socialist and a pacifist, and as a conscientious objector to the war, he stood as a peace candidate for Christchurch South in 1943. His position in the League is not exactly clear, although the letters suggest that, like de la Mare, he shouldered a position of some responsibility. As she grew older, Baughan preferred to occupy a more silent position in the League's activities, but she remained in constant contact with Efford (and thus the progressive developments of penal reform) through her usual medium of a great many lengthy letters. There are several issues that are generally important to these discussions; two of the recurring ones are, firstly, the level of monetary assistance Baughan continued to make available, both to the League, and privately, to Efford, and secondly, their conversations on the abolition of capital and corporal punishment. As with her earlier efforts towards the release of *People in Prison*, Baughan was unfailingly generous with her contributions both to the Howard League, and to the personal finances of Efford. The money given to the charitable organisation itself was not particularly unusual: it is clear from a proliferation of references in her other incoming correspondence, that Baughan also enjoyed making donations to the Vedanta societies in both California and Calcutta. With regard to her financial independence, Berta

⁴⁵ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 2 June, 1937, MS 0144-4, Wtu.

⁴⁶ Letter from Baughan to Mr Beck, 9 December, 1948, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

⁴⁷ Apart from Efford's few pamphlets which he published himself, I have been able to find no record of any biographical details.

Burns refers to Baughan's own hard work towards penal reform: 'I once said in my youthful ignorance, "If you are financially free of this world, why do you work so hard for nothing?" Her reply was, "My dear, that is just WHY! Because I am free it is incumbent on me to put something back into life.'⁴⁸ Yet Baughan had still to be economical with her money at times, and indeed, the earlier allusion to her mortgage payments demonstrates just how much her repeated generosity actually depleted her personal financial reserves. Obviously though, she enjoyed making money available, where and when it was needed, to those causes which she considered to be worthy of support. Well aware through her own experiences as Dominion Secretary of the Howard League that Lincoln Efford was also working 'hard for nothing,' he appears to have been one of these causes.

Baughan was also cognizant of the 'injustice' that the unequal distribution of money could provoke, particularly when it affected the plight of her prisoners: 'I wish someone would expose the penal injustice of "fines or prison" - which means unequal justice for rich and poor.'⁴⁹ After she had become less actively involved herself, a decision which she made late in her life at age seventy, she was equally appreciative of the fact that her capital might continue to assist those still working hard for the reforms she had initiated. As the beneficiary of most of her funds, Efford appears, too, to have suffered from recurrent illness and poor health, and seems to have been unable to maintain other employment in addition to his reform efforts. Baughan thus considered it necessary to supplement his income, as a means of helping out with expenses incurred through travel and other League work. The majority of these donations seem to have been made from about 1947, although it is apparent from

⁴⁸ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

letters in the same year that a level of financial support had been ongoing for some time. However, there appears also to have been some conflict as to the manner in which money would be made available. In September, 1947, Baughan indicated that she was interested in donating a large amount of money (a sum which also gives good indication of the extent of her generosity) for the benefit of both Efford individually, and the League: '...I'd rather give a lump sum, say of 250 pounds, right now, made out to you a/c Howard League...you simply set up a separate account for the League, a trust account.'⁵⁰ Efford, though, seemed not to like this idea, and replied: '...if a trust account were created...it is quite likely the authorities would be interested...it seems the best way would be for me to put some of the money into my small post office account...and to hold the rest to spend as I require it, or to pay at least some of it into this or another friend's account...'⁵¹ Baughan replied with a cheque for fifty pounds, and the following letter: '...put it into your own post office account and hereafter send me your bills for books, stationery, journeys, etc...I don't much like the idea of handing it on to somebody else's account...'⁵²

However, although Efford appears to have been happy to accept Baughan's intermittent payments, he was less comfortable sending her his bills: 'I am grateful for your asking me to send you my bills for books, stationery, journeys etc, as often as I like, though I expect I shall find that difficult to do, and I should like to feel that when you think fit you will take the initiative in sending me something as you have in the past...'⁵³ In addition, there was also some later confusion about which money was designated for the League, and which was for Efford's own personal expenditure.

⁴⁹ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 24 January, 1955, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁵⁰ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 5 August, 1947, MS 445, Wtu.

⁵¹ Letter from Efford to Baughan, 3 September, 1947, MS 445, Wtu.

⁵² Letter from Baughan to Efford, 10 September, 1947, MS 445, Wtu.

Berta Burns had obviously nominated herself as watchdog over the increasingly elderly Baughan, and notes that: 'At times her heart quite out-ran her head and she was slow to perceive weaknesses in people who sought assistance (usually financial) from her.'⁵⁴ Burns was, too, at least for a time, concerned about the amount of money Baughan was giving to Efford. In 1948, Baughan herself wrote to him, outlining this confusion, and assuring him that the finances she made available were intended for his own use:

Mrs Burns (Wellington) wrote in some mystification re one hundred pounds 'given me by the League.' But I assured her that it was given to you, not the League, and so it was! Surely you needed some of it for that trip to Auckland and lots of incidental expenses in connection with the League? Do feel free to use it and don't feel it is merely the League's...⁵⁵

By the speed of his reply, dated only two days later, it is obvious that Efford felt very uncomfortable with his situation, and even more so that Burns had questioned it: '...I am upset that there has been some misunderstanding by Mrs Burns about that one hundred pounds, and that you had to explain to her that you had given it to me. I have never mentioned to anyone that one hundred pounds or the other that you have so kindly given me and which I have needed for the various things you know of...'⁵⁶

Although the monetary aspect of Baughan and Efford's dialogue can perhaps seem somewhat dubious, especially in light of Burns' concern, there is no doubt Baughan considered the money to be well spent, and that Efford did complete a great deal of work for the New Zealand Howard League. One of the main motivating factors

⁵³ Letter from Efford to Baughan, 13 September, 1947, MS 445, Wtu.

⁵⁴ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

⁵⁵ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 21 September, 1948, MS 445, Wtu.

⁵⁶ Letter from Efford to Baughan, 23 September, 1948, MS 445, Wtu.

behind this work was the very important discussion regarding capital punishment. Baughan's attitude to the death penalty was influenced, as in other areas, by statistics, debate, and material published in Britain, a country which she felt in most areas of reform, and largely through the assistance of the British Howard League, to be considerably in advance of New Zealand. In 1946, she once more expressed frustration to Efford, demonstrating her ongoing irritation with the slow progress of penal reform here: 'I look again to the English Criminal Justice Bill to help our govt. get a move on...It really must.'⁵⁷ This bill, passed in 1938, included among other provisions 'improvements in the organisation and staffing of the probation service...a sufficient number of probation officers for every area, including at least one woman officer...corrective training and preventative detention...'⁵⁸ However, it should be noted that Britain lagged behind New Zealand on the contentious question of capital punishment, and despite heavy debate and pressure from the English branch of the League, this same bill contained no suggestion of abolition. The death penalty had been suspended in New Zealand in 1935, but argument about the issue and the possibility of its re-introduction continued long after this date, even after it was eventually abolished here by legislation in 1941. In 1949, the New Zealand Howard League published a booklet entitled *Capital Punishment: An Inquiry*, setting out the following objections to 'legal killing,' with Baughan's own early attitudes and influence still strongly apparent:

The homicide rate has shown an unmistakable decline since hanging ceased. However...[g]reatest importance lies in the ethical issues...Capital punishment is indefensible because it is an act of

⁵⁷ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 16 December, 1946, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

⁵⁸ Rose, p.225-6.

violence...Rehabilitation is better than punishment; prevention is better than rehabilitation...The primary objective of the Howard League is the protection of society by the prevention of anti-social behaviour and the scientific treatment of delinquents.⁵⁹

That Baughan was, at age seventy-nine, still very aware of the League's continuing activities in New Zealand, remains evident from her correspondence. In 1950, Efford wrote to Baughan advising her of his progress: 'Just a note to let you know how we are getting on about the capital and corporal punishment issue...I managed to secure an interview with the Minister of Justice, Mr C Webb...We said we would like the opportunity of placing before him at a later date certain proposals for fundamental changes in the penal system...'⁶⁰ Baughan replied, with reference to a recent Howard League publication: 'I see they point out that while discussion on the [British] Crim. Just. Bill was going on, the death penalty was virtually suspended without any increase in murder rate: while after 1948, when hangings began again, the number of murders actually increased.'⁶¹ In addition to the ethical problems which the death penalty invariably raised, then, Baughan maintained that capital punishment was an unnecessarily harsh and ineffective deterrent, and used to support her argument the lack of secondary homicide offences in New Zealand's penal history. In answer to her question 'Can anyone give us the name of any murderer who, after discharge from prison, committed another murder??'⁶² Efford was able to provide statistical evidence: 'I don't think they can produce any murderer in NZ who committed another murder after his release...'⁶³

⁵⁹ *Capital Punishment: An Inquiry*, p. 18-19.

⁶⁰ Letter from Efford to Baughan, 19 May, 1950, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

⁶¹ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 26 May, 1950, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

⁶² Letter from Baughan to Efford, 3 July, 1950, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

⁶³ Letter from Efford to Baughan, 6 July, 1950, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

Given that Baughan's 'Beauty from Ashes' metaphor implies some good in everyone, it is not surprising that she was so vehemently opposed to a sentence as final as capital punishment. It appears, too, that she was unable to reconcile hanging either with Vedantist thought, or with the Christian perspective. In 1955 she wrote to Efford: 'I did hear your debate on C.P...as to the religious angle, have the upholders of C.P ever read the sermon on the mount? Or John VIII.3?⁶⁴ where Jesus saved a woman from capital punishment...'⁶⁵ As Burns notes, prisoners were for Baughan, in every circumstance, 'unhappy people in dire need of study and direction.'⁶⁶ In one article she is quoted as follows: 'I have boys, girls, men, women, drunkards, murderers, thieves and forgers, and can honestly say that I find good in them all. They are so ready to respond to an attempt at understanding rather than condemning, that I am convinced this is a hopeful method.'⁶⁷ Yet another letter shows that she was worried about the incarceration of a young girl, the infamous Juliet Hulme, at Mt Eden prison in Auckland: 'He tells me that the supt. of Mt Eden prison is sympathetic about poor Juliet...'⁶⁸

With the right motivation and correctional methods, nobody, according to Baughan, was beyond redemption, a fundamental belief which resulted largely from her spiritual principles. Despite consistent efforts, though, she seems to have encountered frequent delays with red tape and bureaucracy; in 1948, she cried out with impatience to Efford: 'O dear, what a lot does still need to be done, doesn't it?'⁶⁹

⁶⁴ 'The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery... "In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now what do you say?"...he straightened himself up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her..."' John 5.3-7. *Good News Bible*, p.128-9.

⁶⁵ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 30 September, 1955, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁶⁶ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

⁶⁷ 'Miss B.E. Baughan: Poetess, Writer and Social Worker,' *The Ladies Mirror*, 2 October, 1922.

⁶⁸ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 19 September, 1954, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁶⁹ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 14 April, 1948, MS 132, Box 1, MBL.

Yet though progress was slow, Baughan and other members of the Howard League did sometimes have cause for celebration, and in 1952, she was able to write with pride: 'Very glad to see, by yesterday's Press, that the idea of flogging, seems to have been (so far) dropped.'⁷⁰ In one of her last letters to Efford she was jubilant again, and using a very Bethell-like metaphor: 'When Mrs Mackie always used to complain that we never seemed to accomplish anything, he [Mr Mackie⁷¹] used always to assure her that we "we were doing the spade work." Now, thirty years later, this looks to be showing a sprout!'⁷²

Both Efford and de la Mare continued to consult Baughan on reform activities right up until the time of her death, and encouraged her to participate as much as she was able. In 1956, de la Mare wrote asking for her opinion on pornography, and the letter which he received in reply demonstrated that her opinions were as assertive as ever: 'The idea of asking a lifelong and determined old virgin about pornography!...Of course, I don't agree that mating is creation's only reason for sex in its wider sense. Lots of us, like me, have had good reasons for avoiding it and occupying ourselves otherwise: and lots of us, in consequence, are not unhappy failures, but seem, in consequence, to find satisfaction in the development of higher human activities...'⁷³ It was of course partly through 'occupying herself otherwise' and the pursuit of her independent single life, that Baughan had been able to spend so much effort on penal reform, and in turn it had become, as she suggests, one of her 'higher human activities.' Her recognition of its importance, however, could not

⁷⁰ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 20 June, 1952, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁷¹ Burns advises that Mr C.R.N Mackie was one of a member of the first Howard League meeting in New Zealand. Others present were 'B.E. Baughan, Mrs Page (Quaker), Robt. M. Laing (the noted botanist), Mrs Tomlinson (Theosophical Society), Norman Bell (university) and myself (journalist).' Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

⁷² Letter from Baughan to Efford, 2 December, 1957, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

prevent the decline of some of her more active participation, including her previously regular letters to the newspapers. It appears that this was a conscious decision on Baughan's part, for Efford writes to her in 1946: 'I am rather sorry you have imposed a rule on yourself not to write to the papers. You did a great educational work in past years in that way, and many were made to think by your letters.'⁷⁴ She had indeed made every effort to educate the public, but it is important to note that, as a major part of her rehabilitation efforts, Baughan was even more concerned with teaching the prisoners she came into contact with. In a letter to Efford, she discusses the case of a repeat offender: ' "I don't know why I keep coming back here" said one extremely puzzled habitual at Mt Eden. Neither did I, for he had a good brain and a good heart. It was he who found the answer for himself - "I never realised before that other people mattered." How can we teach them this simple truth?'⁷⁵ She may sometimes have had difficulty in conveying this sentiment to those she was trying to help, but Baughan herself had long ago acknowledged the importance of 'other people.' A guiding principle of her life's work, it is not surprising that in old age she continued to display a very personal interest in many prisoners.

When physically able, too, Baughan involved herself in cases with as much vigour as ever. One specific instance is noted by Burns, regarding the case of a woman, employed by Baughan, who had been arrested for shoplifting. She writes of the event, to Efford, after Baughan's death: '[She] is a neighbour who for the last five years has "done" what B.E.B would allow her to do in the house. In the middle she went off...on an orgy of shoplifting - probation, 2 years, just expired this week. At 85, B.E.B stood with her in the dock, and to use Muriel's expression "tied the policeman

⁷³ Letter from Baughan to de la Mare, 21 July, 1956, MS 5751-54, Wtu.

in knots!’”⁷⁶ Before going to court, though, Baughan had sought expert opinion on the matter, enforcing her own views with the following comments from a psychiatrist whom she had involved in the case: ‘...hers is no ordinary case of thieving. The background is certainly not good as you probably know and there are obvious instability factors but I am convinced that, in performing her anti-social acts, she was activated by motives beyond her control, deeply hidden in her unconscious mind.’⁷⁷ As a result of such efforts, she was able to write to Burns with at least some good news, in October, after the court appearance: ‘Poor Muriel got off with two years probation...Nobody will give her work...But she remains cheerful and courageous, and a very clever helper. No men I’m glad to say.’⁷⁸ Baughan also showed a great deal of interest in the welfare of a family from Akaroa, after the father was incarcerated at Paparua Prison: ‘There’s a man in Paparua I’d like to ask news of...he was in the post office here, liked by everybody and a retired soldier - but alas an alcoholic and a terrible gambler as it turned out. His wife and two little girls were near neighbours and I was fond of the whole family. He suffered with bad headaches and I doubt if he is getting much help with them in prison?’⁷⁹ Another letter, this time written to Baughan by the man’s wife, indicates that she had also been in direct contact with the family: ‘Thank you so much for your letter it cheered me up considerably you seem to have the happy knack of saying the right things at the moment they’re needed most.’⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Letter from Efford to Baughan, 21 April, 1946, MS 445, Wtu.

⁷⁵ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 2 July, 1955, Ms 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁷⁶ Letter from Burns to Efford, 14 September, 1958, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁷⁷ Letter from Melville H. Aiken to Baughan, 24 August, 1956, MS 198, Wtu.

⁷⁸ Letter from Baughan to Burns, 12 October, 1956, MS 198, Wtu.

⁷⁹ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 17 March, 1958, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁸⁰ Letter from ‘Carmen’ to Baughan, 5 June, 1957, MS 198, Wtu.

The many letters that Baughan wrote in later life demonstrate two central and integrated themes; firstly, the spiritual intensity originating from Vedantist thought, and secondly, the ever pervasive interest in humanitarianism realised through her attentions to penal reform. They illustrate the diversity of dialogue involved in the humanitarian colloquy, and also the interrelated nature of her different conversations. In 1956, after Efford had been ill and in hospital for a lengthy period of time, Baughan wrote him a letter of support conveying the intense certainty with which she now regarded her own destiny: 'At my age I face death daily, and what a comfort it is to feel that we really are in "Higher Hands," which can be wholly trusted...for my own part I find that strength enough comes if one resolutely turns away from "Dear old Me" to that life in which and through which we all exist...'⁸¹ After suffering for some time from ill-health, she died peacefully in September, 1958, at eighty-eight years old. The life she had led left her with no fear of death, and to her friend Berta Burns, she gave the following instruction: 'Do not grieve, when you know how glad I shall have been to go.'⁸²

3. Conclusion: The 'Real' Art of Social Service

There is no doubt that social reform captivated much of Baughan's energy in life, and that in fulfilling her own criteria for spiritual *samadhi* she worked selflessly to

⁸¹ Letter from Baughan to Efford, 1 March, 1956, MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

⁸² This was an instruction left for Burns, by Baughan, which she received after her death, and repeated in a letter fragment to Efford sometime late in 1958. MS 132, 5/1, MBL.

fulfil the needs of others. Given the 30-years-service badge of the Red Cross, she was also invested with the King George V Jubilee Medal for social service.⁸³ In the present context, however, her humanitarian efforts are perhaps best summed up in her own words: 'Social service is really an art, and needs the due artistic aptitude.'⁸⁴ Baughan's prison work (the basis of the memorial by which Burns tells us she is best remembered⁸⁵) was the art to which she dedicated much of her life. And, as part of her own particular 'artistic aptitude,' Baughan the prison reformer was still at all times a writer: the huge amount of energy she poured into the *People in Prison* campaign and the multitude of letters from which we can reconstruct her work remain testament to this fact.

Reading Baughan's colloquy provides for a new understanding of her life, transforming what has traditionally been seen as a rupture between her capacities as poet and social reformist into a continuity. The investigation of this later writing with its culmination in penal reform demonstrates to what extent Baughan privileged her discourse of interrelated conversations, and also how completely she abandoned the idea of herself as poet. However, in the same way that she had earlier adapted her verse to the audience around her, Baughan proved able to locate and relate to the audience involved in her humanitarian efforts. In this ultimate expression of colloquy, Baughan, as always, was well aware both whom she was 'speak[ing] to'⁸⁶ and whom she was 'writ[ing] for.'⁸⁷

What this thesis confirms, then, is that running parallel to the framework established by the cultural nationalists is a directly contrary discourse: Baughan's

⁸³ Berta Burns Memoirs, MS 198, Wtu.

⁸⁴ *People in Prison*, p. 166.

⁸⁵ Burns, MS 198, Wtu. See Introduction, p. 7.

⁸⁶ Jackson, 'Poetry.' See Ch.2, p.58.

colloquy, with its focus on camaraderie and community is the antithesis of the more familiar mid-century project with its emphasis on isolation and cultural dislocation. A comment in a letter written the year before she died demonstrates just how much of an affinity Baughan had developed with her new home: 'I'd like to believe I'd done any good service to a country that had done so much for me...'⁸⁸ Epitomising Baughan's outlook on life in New Zealand, this remark illustrates an approach inconsistent with that which included the 'conflict of the exiled spirit.'⁸⁹ The determination to involve herself in 'good service' and the colloquy which resulted, provided for a different and more positive sense of relation to colonial locality and lifestyle. It is this same attitude that affords hope in 'A Bush Section.' Baughan denies authority to the agenda of the masculinists by embracing the literary aspects of the colonial community in a much more comprehensive and integrated way. In this outlook, she is representative of an alternative paradigm based on an intricate network of conversations, a paradigm which diametrically opposes the single critical agenda so firmly established by Curnow. It is perhaps the greatest irony, then, that the one colonial woman credited with portraying those values paramount to masculinism, the same writer of a poem that 'exhibit[ed] such unabashed truth to its subject,' is one through whom the cultural nationalist story may eventually be undone.

⁸⁷ Curnow, 'Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*.' See Ch. 2, p.58.

⁸⁸ Letter from Baughan to a 'Friend' (possibly Lincoln Efford), July 21, 1957, MS 132, Box 5/1, MBL.

⁸⁹ Curnow, 'Introduction to *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-45*,' *LBH*, p.47.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS BY BAUGHAN

Baughan, B.E. *Verses*. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co, 1898.

———. *Reuben and other Poems*. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co, Ltd, 1903.

———. *Shingle-Short and other Verses*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd, 1908.

———. *Brown Bread from a Colonial Oven*. London: Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd, 1912.

———. *Glimpses of New Zealand Scenery*. Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1922.

———. *Poems from the Port Hills*. Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd, 1923.

———. *People in Prison*. Auckland: Unicorn Press, 1936.

———. *Two New Zealand Roses*, Unpublished manuscript, MS Papers 198, Wtu.

WORKS ABOUT BAUGHAN

Alcock, P. 'A Catch and a Cantata in the Wilderness: Two Unabashed Exhibits from Miss Baughan.' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol 24, No 1, 1989. pp.103-113.

Alcock, P. 'A True Colonial Voice: Blanche Edith Baughan.' *Landfall*, Vol 26, 1972. pp.162-176.

'Blanche Edith Baughan: The Prisoners' Friend.' *New Zealand Listener*, September 12, 1958.

'A Champion of the Feeble Minded: Woman's Lead for Social Reforms.' *The Mirror*, 1 August, 1928.

Harris, Nancy. *Making it New: Modernism in B.E. Baughan's New Zealand Poetry*. Ph.D Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1992.

'Miss B.E. Baughan: Poetess, Writer and Social Worker.' *Ladies Mirror*, 2 October, 1922.

'New Zealand Champion of Penal Reform.' *New Zealand Women's Weekly*. November 1935.

MANUSCRIPT PAPERS

Andersen Papers (Johannes Carl), MS 7, The Auckland Institute and Museum Library.

Baughan Papers (Blanche Edith), MS 0198, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
 MS 3317, Wtu.
 MS 0717/1, Wtu.
 MS 0144-4, Wtu.
 MS 0445-02, Wtu.
 MS 5751-14, Wtu.

Bethell Papers (Ursula Mary), MS 38, Letters from B.E. Baughan, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Howard League for Penal Reform Papers, MS 132, Box 1 (Correspondence 1920-1960) Box 5/1 (Baughan Material), Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

Kinsey Papers (Sir Joseph), MS-Copy-Microfilm 0528-2, Wtu.

Mackay Papers (Jessie), Kindly supplied by the Wells family, Christchurch.

Winston Rhodes Papers (Harold), MS 0888, Wtu.

OTHER WORKS

Bahadur, K.P. *The Wisdom of Vedaanta*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, 1983.

Beidler, William. *The Vision of Self in Early Vedanta*. Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 1975.

Bornholdt, J., G. O'Brien, and M. Williams, eds. *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Brewer, Rosemary. *A Pilgrim in the Library: The Private Letters and Public Poetry of Mary Ursula Bethell*. M.A Thesis, University of Auckland, 1995.

Brookes, B., C. Macdonald, and M. Tennant, eds. *Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand*. Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

Caffin, Elizabeth. 'Poetry 1945-90.' *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*. Ed. T. Sturm. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.385-445.

- Carter, Sue. *She'll be right: Feminist Perspective in New Zealand Fiction*. M.A Thesis, University of Auckland, 1994.
- Chapman, M. *et al. Jessie Mackay: A Woman Before Her Time*. Geraldine: PCCL Services, 1997.
- Courage, Sarah. *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life*. (First published c.1896) Christchurch: Whitcoulls Publishers, 1976.
- Curnow, A. *Look Back Harder*. Ed. P.Simpson. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987.
- Efford, Lincoln. *Penalties on Conscience*. Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1945.
- Efford, Lincoln. 'The Indeterminate Sentence and Habitual Criminals in New Zealand.' *The Howard Journal*. Undated.
- Else, Anne. 'Not More Than Man Nor Less: The Treatment of Women Poets in *Landfall*, 1947-1961.' *Landfall* 156, Vol 29, No 4, December, 1985, pp. 431-445.
- Evans, Patrick. *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*. Auckland: Penguin, 1990.
- Gries, Joan. *The Outline of Prose Fiction in New Zealand*. Ph.D Thesis, Auckland University College, 1951.
- Hall, W. W. *Recorded Illuminates*. London: The C.W. Daniel Co.Ltd, 1937.
- Holcroft, M. *Discovered Isles: A Trilogy*. Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1950.
- Isherwood, C., ed. *Vedanta for the Western World*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1948.
- Jackson, MacD. P. 'Poetry: Beginnings to 1945.' *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*. Ed. T. Sturm. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 335-384.

James, Trevor. 'Religious Awareness in New Zealand Poetry: A Problem for the Imagination.' *World Literature Written in English*. Vol 24, No.2, Autumn, 1984. pp. 429-443.

Jensen, K. *Whole Men: The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996.

Johnson, Raynor. *Watcher on the Hills*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959.

Leggott, M. 'Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the Persistence of Record.' *Opening the Book: New Essays on New Zealand Writing*. Ed. M. Leggott & M. Williams. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995.

McCormick, E.H. *New Zealand Literature: A Survey*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

McEldowney, Dennis. 'Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines.' *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*. Ed. T. Sturm. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.545-600.

McNaughton, Trudie, ed. *Countless Signs: The New Zealand Landscape in Literature*. Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986.

Mackay, Jessie. *Land of the Morning*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1909.

Macleod, Nellie. *A Voice on the Wind*. Wellington: A.H & A.W.Reed, 1955.

New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform. *Capital Punishment: An Inquiry*. Printed by Harry H. Tombs, Ltd, 1949.

Ofner, S., ed. *New Zealand Women in the 19th Century*. Auckland: MacMillan, 1993.

- Orange, C., ed. *The Suffragists: Women Who Worked for the Vote*. Wellington: Jointly published by Bridget Williams Books Ltd. and the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 1993
- Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979.
- Roberts, H. *Where did she come from? New Zealand Women Novelists 1862-1987*. Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1989.
- Russ, J. *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.
- Scholefield, G., ed. *Who's Who in NZ*. Wellington: A.H & A.W Reed, 1951.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks are due first and foremost to my supervisor, Dr John Newton, for his insight, endless patience and encouragement. Thanks also to Jessie Wells, who organised my access to the Mackay material, and to Liz at the Macmillan Brown Library for her help sourcing material when I was starting out. More thanks to my family - to Mum, for her optimism and faith in me, to Greta, for always, always being there, and to Dad, for his fab supply of vegetables. Finally, to Henry, for your constant support, good humour and tolerance - this is for you, with love.